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OR, THE SHARPER DUKE IN UTAH.

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LEM," "SINGER SAM," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SONG-BIRD FROM THE RANCH.

THE streets verging on the theater building were crowded with hurrying groups. It was the opening night of an opera troupe, and opera was a form of amusement comparatively new to the people of the little city by the great inland salt sea. Not only was there to be an opera—a notable novelty in itself—but a voice was to be heard whose fame had already gone abroad over the length and breadth of the land, from the northernmost mountains to the furthest outlying hamlet on the verge of the great alkali desert.

A STRONG SURGE AND WRENCH AT THE BAR TORE IT AWAY, AND THE IMPERILED MARK WAS FREE TO LEAP OUT.

"A new song-bird of the wilderness, whose warblings rival the performances of the most gifted prima donnas of the Old World!"

So ran the notices on the bill-boards; and, when it was announced that this new song-bird was a Utah product, the enthusiasm of the people of Salt Lake City was given a tremendous impetus.

These early settlers of the Jordan Valley and the Utah table-lands were like all Westerners in this—there was, to them, no country like their own, no people so energetic, no soil so prolific, and no climate so smiling and salubrious. Hence, they were ready to receive this prodigy of the alkaline plains with open arms and to give her a right royal welcome.

The jostling throng poured in an eager, steady tide through the open doorway of the theater, which stood, and still stands, for that matter, on the corner of one of the principal streets not far from the great temple square. It was never a beautiful structure, viewed from the outside, though its interior is commodious and pleasing. At the time of this story it was still looked on as an innovation whose wisdom was to be questioned, even though its erection and devotion to the Thespian Muse was sanctioned by the highest authorities of the Latter Day Saints.

A portly, clean-shaven man, with a puffy, flabby face, elbowed his way smilingly through the pressing crowds. He was everywhere greeted with marks of respect, and room was made for him as if he were some great personage. An air of priestly sanctimoniousness rested on his puffy features, though there was nothing priestly in his character. A stranger would have set him down as a high church dignitary. He would have been deceived, too, for this suave and bland individual made little pretensions to religion.

Having gained the interior of the building, he proceeded to a private box, which he dignifiedly and deliberately entered, and from his elevated position surveyed the gathering audience with careless curiosity.

He took out a neatly printed programme, which had been tucked carelessly in a pocket of his vest, and glanced it over. His eyes rested with uncommon interest on the name, "Irene Imboden." It was the name of the new opera-singer.

"Imboden! Imboden!" he muttered. "Irene Imboden! I hope she's as pretty as her name. Likely, though, she's a fright, for these people don't know what beauty is! I'll make her acquaintance, at any rate!"

With this he sunk back in his cushioned seat and again contemplated the faces before him.

He saw the people stare at him, and caught the whispered exclamation: "There's the duke!" and a scornful half-smile curled his lips.

"The fools! The worshipers of the golden calf are still abroad in the world, and Salt Lake has its share of them. It's so much the better for me!"

Then he lapsed into thoughtfulness, from which he aroused only at intervals, until an unusual commotion told him an event of importance was at hand. He came out of the mazes of thought that had engrossed him, and stared down at the stage. The orchestral voluntaries had ended and he had not heard them; neither had he heard the words of the manager, who had ventured on a short preliminary address.

Now he had no need of ears, for the vision that blessed his sight engrossed every sense and faculty. The buzz of approbation swelled about him unnoticed. He could only look, and look, and look.

It was a vision of remarkable beauty. A young girl had advanced timidly from the wings; and now stood, with fluttering breath, trembling form, and half-abashed glance before that vast sea of murmuring heads.

She was rather below medium height, with a pale face that had yet the roses of health abloom upon it. She was gracefully and girlishly slender; and the long, trailing robe gave an added dignity to her carriage. But her great charm lay in her face and in her soulful, speaking eyes. There have been other faces more beautiful, judging by the hard lines of the artist's standard. There were in the audience before her womanly faces quite as handsome, judged

by the same standard. But there was such a sweet queenliness, such a look of pure and budding womanhood in her appearance, as she stood there so shyly and irresolutely, that one could not help being drawn to her.

No one was giving any heed to the puffy-faced man in the box, whose coming had attracted such notice a short time before. Perhaps this was well for him!

He had dropped back against the soft cushions, his face changing to a livid, ghastly hue, and had muttered:

"My God! What is *she* doing here?"

He seemed to shrink and cower within himself, and drew a fold of the curtain across the lower part of his face as if by that means to shield himself from her gaze.

His big, watery eyes, set in pursy pouches of flesh, were glued to her face with apparent immovability. His fat hands worked convulsively; so convulsively that the white nails were driven into the flesh. A gurgling sigh swelled from the depths of his ample chest.

"How—did—she—get—here?"

Again the question arose for answer, and no answer came.

It was all too evident that whoever this queenly young woman might be, her coming forward had startled him. He had awaited the appearance of the song-bird; the song-bird had come; and had brought to him a most disagreeable shock!

A student of human nature, observing the strange workings of his drawn and haggard face, would have said he was afraid of her. Yet, in her girlish innocence, there seemed about this girl nothing that might harm a fly.

Her voice—she had begun to sing—swelled upward in a lilting, trilling melody; a melody that seemed to have been caught from the notes of wild birds.

Her apparent timidity vanished, her eyes took on a clear, joyous sparkle, and her soulful gaze swept the sea of faces with rapidly returning confidence.

She was absorbed in the theme of the composer and in the words of the poet; and, forgetful of self, sung with all the melodious abandonment of a mocking-bird.

Throughout it all the man in the box retained his crouching attitude of fear; and when she retired, with the acclaim of the audience sweeping like a storm through the big building, a look of troubled thought came down on his visage like a somber cloud.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE OF DESERET.

At the end of the first act, the occupant of the box managed, amid the confusion incident to the going and coming of many, to make his way behind the scenes almost unobserved. If any saw him, they gave the act little heed.

He was still pale, but he had regained control of his nerves and outwardly calm.

He approached one of the actors and beckoned to him, drawing the actor into a dark recess when he had come forward in answer to the summons.

"Ah! Major Mix! You quite startled me! You're not looking well!" the actor began; but the man silenced him with an angry growl.

"Don't bother about my health, please. Who is she? That's what I want to know?"

"She, who?"

"As if there could be more than one! The singer? What's her name?"

"Imboden."

"Stuff! No more than it is mine. If you don't know, you needn't answer. But perhaps you can tell me where she came from?"

"Ay! that I can; and with pleasure. She's from a ranch out here a ways in the country. One of the elders was making his rounds and chanced to hear her sing. He brought the news back with him, and raved so that she was summoned to come here to exhibit her voice. She captured her hearers; and—well—she's here, and that tells the story. She's been added to the regular stock company of the theater, and will likely sing every night through the season. Hasn't she got a voice, though?"

"If I had that elder here I'd gladly wring his neck!" and the way in which this was said showed the speaker's earnestness.

"Such a fool job as these fellows have made

of it! But, what am I babbling about? You can arrange for me to see her, I suppose?"

The actor had stared at him in amazement, but nevertheless answered quickly enough.

"No trouble about that, I guess. She's easily approached. Hasn't been spoiled yet, you see. Is as innocent as a spring chicken. She'll be glad to make your acquaintance, when I announce who you are. This way, please."

He was fantastically garbed, having counterfeited with considerable skill the character of a drinking, swearing sea-booter of the Middle Ages.

They found the "song-bird," Miss Irene Imboden, without difficulty, and the actor introduced to her the puffy-faced man, under the grandiloquent title of, "Major Marlton Mix, the Duke of Deseret."

The name and high-sounding title seemed to convey to her nothing. She acknowledged the introduction with much natural grace and proved herself a good listener and a fair talker. As the actor had intimated, she was wholly unversed in the ways of the world, and knew not that it was scarcely the proper thing to thus receive a gentleman caller. She looked on the actor as a friend, and did not dream that he might introduce to her attention an improper character.

"I have heard you spoken of," she replied, with rare ingenuousness, in reply to one of Mix's anxious queries, "and have heard it said you are very, very rich! It must be nice to be so rich one doesn't know what to do with one's money!"

"But your name isn't Imboden?" he questioned, coming with blunt abruptness to the point uppermost in his mind.

"How did you know that?" and she gave him a little startled glance.

"No, it isn't Imboden. They put that in the bills because they thought it would sound nice and look nice in print. But, oh! I forgot—I wasn't to say anything about that! You'll not repeat it? The manager might be angry!"

"Egad!" he muttered, as he left her side after some further conversation, and again sought the actor. "She don't know as much as I feared. But her presence here will make trouble. Some of these fools will fall in love with her, and find out more than she knows or they ought to know. What the deuce did the president and the counselors mean by bringing her here, anyway?"

A hidden fear gnawed at his heart and filled him with secret misgivings.

"See here, Bloucher," and he once more buttonholed the fantastically-garbed actor and drew him into the dark corner, "I want to get you to do me a favor. For pay, you understand; big pay! I never ask people to work for me for nothing."

"Certainly! Anything I can do for you, duke, I'll be most happy!"

"Isn't there some way to get that girl off the stage and away from here? I prefer, for reasons of my own, that she should return to the ranch and remain there. Her presence here may bring me trouble. I speak thus frankly to you because I know you. We know each other! Neither of us are saints, if we do live in the land of the Saints? Eh?"

A smile that was meant to be conciliatory, but which was nothing short of diabolical, swept over his fat face.

"I'll help you, if I can see my way clear. But I'll tell you now, you can't get her to go back to that poky ranch. She's found out her power, and here she'll stay; and if not here, elsewhere. And if you could send her back there, her admirers would mighty soon hunt her up and insist on her return."

"Strategy always beats force, Bloucher. Season your schemes with a little cunning if you would win. I've got the thing already arranged. A thousand dollars is yours, if you'll help me carry out the plan, I've formed."

"Out with it!" his eyes sparkling with greed.

"It can't be done to-night," said Mix, drawing nearer and still further lowering his voice. "I've got to prepare for it. But I can count on you?"

"Yes; if it ain't murder!"

"And then, if the pay is big enough!"

"I don't stick my head into no halter for

a paltry thousand dollars," the other growled, drawing back in dismay.

The duke laughed harshly.

"It's not so bad as that, Bloucher. I was just trying your nerve. You haven't as much as I thought."

"I've got nerve, as you call it," Bloucher asserted, "but I ain't fool enough to run big risks without big pay."

"What I shall ask of you will be the easiest thing in the world. As for risk, there'll be absolutely none, if you use ordinary discretion."

"Out with it, then. I can tell better about that, when I know what you mean to propose."

Mix drew him still closer.

"As you say, it will be no use to get the girl sent back to the ranch. She wouldn't stay there; and there might be some people who would want to bring her forward again, even if she were so disposed. What's the magnet that draws them, Bloucher?"

"Her singing, of course!"

"And her beauty!"

"That's an item, I allow; but her voice is the chief factor."

"And if she had neither voice nor beauty, she would be dropped?"

"You bet! Like a hot coal!"

"Then you have my plan. Deprive her of these things, and she'll go back to the seclusion of the ranch, and stay there!"

"You're shouting too high for me, duke!" and Bloucher grinned amiably. "Come down the tree a little. How's all this to be done?"

"You're to be the instrument, Bloucher! I know of a preparation, which, dropped into her tea, will rob her as completely of that voice as if she'd been born dumb; and I know acid that will eat holes in that satiny face and leave scars that will make her so hideous that her best lover will run from her!"

"You're a devil, major!" the actor gasped.

"Only the Duke of Deseret up in arms, my dear Bloucher!"

"Twould be a pity to do that! And she's got a lover, too—an amateur here in the company. He's playing the Corsican Corsair tonight, and a likely fellow he is. You've seen him. His father is one of the big guns of the Church."

"Who?" Mix asked.

"Lanyard."

"A fig for Lanyard! Will you do what I ask of you?"

"I'd rather not throw the stuff in her face?"

"Will you do what I ask?"

The actor hesitated. A thousand dollars was a good deal to him; and, besides, he was somewhat in the power of this fiendish major.

"Bring the truck here," he said, finally. "I think I can arrange it. I can upset the bottle, or something, and make it appear an accident. Yes; I'll do it. At any rate, I'll make a try of it."

"No flunking, now, if you undertake it!" Mix growled. "And be careful how you go about it. If worked right, no one will ever suspect either of us."

Bloucher nodded another assent; and, after a few parting injunctions, the Duke of Deseret hurried away, his mind filled with the plot aimed at the future and happiness of the young vocalist.

All unconscious of the existence of these enemies, and intoxicated by her success, Irene Imboden was at that moment pouring forth her soul in a flood of melody.

A shower of bouquets fell at her feet, and she bowed herself again from the stage amid a whirlwind of applause.

CHAPTER III.

A TEARFUL INTERVIEW.

THE great stacks of scaffolding about the walls of the unfinished temple cast their shadows in fanciful tracery athwart the moonlit grounds. Near them rose the mysterious Endowment House, devoted to strange and mystic rites, and beyond was the oval body of the tabernacle, outlined like a giant egg.

But none of these things held any interest for the two people who were walking slowly, and with bowed heads close together, along

the almost deserted street. One of them was Irene Imboden, the new queen of song; and the other was a young man, in the first flush and promise of commanding and manly strength.

He was the lover who had been spoken of by Bloucher; and a most devoted lover was Mark Lanyard, as could be seen by his manner and attitude.

The opera was over, the crowds had gone home, the theater lights were out; and the two were strolling slowly in the direction of Irene's present abode, as was their wont after the close of the play.

"You would care a little bit, Jessie?" Lanyard ventured. "You would care more than a little bit, I hope, if they should make me go there?"

Her lips quivered and a tear dropped from her cheek.

"You do love me?" he pleaded, slipping an arm about her waist, underneath the loose folds of the shawl that shielded her from the chill of the air.

She removed it gently, thereby intimating that that was not the time and place for such liberties. But, as if to repay him, she turned a pair of starry, tear-filled eyes to his:

"You know I love you, Mark! I fear, too much. I don't believe I could live without you! But, will you have to go away?"

He caught her hand and pressed it rapturously to his lips.

"Father says I must go. The Apostolic Council has ordered me to England to serve there three years as a missionary. You know what that means? I must go, as did the disciples of old, without purse or scrip. I should not object, if—"

He did not finish the sentence. His tumultuous thoughts shook his voice so that what he had said was scarcely to be made out.

"If what?" she anxiously questioned.

"If I thought there was no trick in it. Father is high up in the service of the church, you know, and I ought to consider this call an honor. But I can't help the belief that it's made at this time for the sole purpose of dragging me away from you."

She could only gasp her dismay.

"That's what I think!" he declared, his voice growing harsher. "And if I were sure of it, I'd refuse point-blank to obey."

He caught her closer to him, for he perceived that she was trembling, that her gait was unsteady and she seemed about to fall prone to the earth.

"You must not feel so badly about it, love!" he urged, though pleased with this new evidence of her affection.

"What makes you think there's something wrong in the order?" she asked, faintly.

"For the simple reason that only a few days ago father was outlining to me his plans for my future, and there was nothing of this sort mentioned. He was desirous that I should go into business here."

They had reached the gate in front of the house where she was staying.

She hesitated, fearing for him to depart, and not knowing how to terminate the interview, or what to say. She loved this man desperately, yet she did not wish to seem forward or unwomanly. Least of all did she desire to be the wooer instead of the woed.

What he had imparted to her had come as a stunning shock. She could not but feel that it was aimed at their mutual happiness.

"You will not go?" she said, at last, laying her hand softly in his. "I would be the last to keep you from the path of duty, but I cannot feel that this is the call of duty."

"I will not go!" he asserted, with sudden fierceness, returning her hand-clasp with a grip that made her wince. "I will not go; and all the power of the Church can't make me. I'll defy them to do their worst. Bah! they're but a lot of schemers at best! I'll not go!"

He could see that the decision pleased her; but that, while grateful, she was anxious, and even alarmed, for his safety.

"It is a great power you are defying!" she said in soft warning.

"I will not go!" he declared. "I think I see through the whole thing. You have had suitors by the dozen since your appearance here in Salt Lake."

A hot flush served as a confession.

"But you have given them no encouragement, I know that full well. You see I haven't been a mole-like lover. They have discovered that you care more for me than for any of them."

"Much more, dear Mark!"

"And seeing that they've no show to win you while I'm here, they have set this trap to get rid of me. But, I'll not fall into it. That for their commands! I won't go, I tell you! I'll defy them!"

Her grip on his hand tightened.

"I'm so glad," she faltered. "But, oh! Mark, I shall fear for you every hour and every minute. Now, kiss me, and good-night!"

She held up her tempting lips for the customary kiss; then glided away like a shadow, leaving him alone with his new resolve and this new and little understood danger.

CHAPTER IV.

FLOTSAM, THE FIRE-KING.

A FEW evenings after the interview above given, there sat in a wing of the theater a shabbily-dressed, oldish man, whose appearance was peculiarly alert and belied somewhat his seeming age.

He was dressed in eccentric fashion; wearing doublet and hose, soft, pointed shoes, and a purple head-covering from which rose a pair of clownish ears. Over all was drawn a soiled linen coat, giving him altogether a very marked and peculiar appearance.

His face was sunken at the sides, as if from loss of teeth, and wrinkled good-humoredly at the corners of the mouth. His eyes, which were small, were very bright; and his beard was scanty.

This was Flotsam, the fire-king, whose marvelous feats had been lavishly advertised as one of the special features of the evening's performance.

He was seated at a little table, on which rested a large black bottle. This bottle he had just produced from a pocket of the big linen coat; and from time to time he looked at it as if desirous of getting at its contents.

Opposite to him, at the same table, sat the actor, Bloucher, already known to the reader. He was "gotten up" again as the buccaneer, and looked it every inch.

"Hey a taste, podner!" Flotsam urged, pushing the bottle toward Bloucher. "It'll put nerve into ye to do yer part. A pirut hain't wu'th shucks, ef he ain't got a little likker into him."

Bloucher was nothing averse to "helping himself," and poured a generous quantity of the liquor into the glass which stood near.

Fergus Flotsam, for that was the name which the "fire-king" had given, also filled a glass from the bottle; and the two, then, wishing each other luck, and clinking their glasses merrily, drained off the contents.

It must have been potent liquor, indeed, for Bloucher had scarcely swallowed the draught, when its effects began to be manifest. He talked glibly and with less caution, and fell into a strain of familiar jocularity.

On the other hand, the stiff drink taken by the fire-king seemed to affect him no more than so much water. Any one observing the phenomenon would have thought him case-hardened indeed.

"What brought you here, anyway, old man?" Bloucher queried, eying this new acquaintance with renewed interest. "A man as can do the tricks you're up to is a blamed fool for burying himself out here. Why don't you go to New York, or London? You'd make a sensaish!"

"What did I come out hyer fer?" and Flotsam winked quizzically. "Well, seein' it's you, podner, I don't mind tellin' ye! I come out hyer to git me a wife. A feller kin hev a half-a-dozen, ef he wants 'em, an' kin git 'em. I low I'll go in fer the hull b'ilin'!"

Bloucher regarded him with half-drunk gravity.

"You ain't really meanin' it?"

"Why, podner," and there was a peculiar uplifting of the shaggy eyebrows, "don't you think I c'u'd handle 'em?"

"Well, likely you could," and Bloucher leaned unsteadily back in his seat. "A man that can eat fire and chew up red-hot pokers and drink whisky so boilin' hot that it sizzles in his mouth can do a'most anything, I reckon. But I shouldn't, speakin' for myself, want to try."

"Hed experience, eh?" and Flotsam indulged in a quiet chuckle.

"Me an' the darlin' o' my bosom has parted!" Bloucher declared, gravely. "She was an actress, or thought she was, and she thought herself doggoned handsome, and a lot of bilks thought the same, and persisted in tellin' her so. I tried to stop it; and—well, you know how it allers goes in such a case! We sep'rated!"

"My hand, podner!" and Flotsam reached out his thin fingers. "I'm downright sorry fer ye. Drown it in the flowin' bowl."

He pushed the bottle forward, and again Bloucher helped himself, and the two drank as before.

"Talkin' about actresses an' sich," observed the fire-king, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, "what do you know about this 'ere singer? She's about the slap-upset, purtiest piece o' calico these ole optics ever looked on; and she can sing like a meddler-lark. Where'd she come frum? Didn't low the hull of Deseret could perjuice a gal like her!"

"Immediately, when a woman's good-lookin', the deuce is to pay!" Bloucher observed, with a frown. "Likely tain't their fault; but a lot of fools goes at once crazy over them, an' trouble comes; an' if they can sing as well as look purty, it's so much the worse."

He looked at Flotsam as he delivered himself of this bit of wisdom, as if he fancied he was giving a sufficient answer to the latter's question.

"I reckon you're p'intedly right about that. But that don't tell me nothin' about this hyer girl. You see, podner, I'm thinkin' o' makin' her one o' the wives I was tellin' ye 'bout. The fu'st wife an' the fav'rite; but I don't want to go fer to jump the track through ignorance. If you'll tell me what you know about her, it'll help me to work the trick, an' I'll be everlastin' obliged."

Bloucher laughed scornfully. He was more intoxicated than ever, but not so much so that he could not perceive the utter absurdity of the fire-king's plans.

"I reckon she wouldn't look twice at an old jay like you."

Flotsam got up and gazed critically down at the linen coat, at the queer pointed shoes, at the hose and slashed doublet. Then felt the horns protruding from his cap.

"Twould 'most seem to her like marryin' the devil, I reckon! But you must reeclect, podner, that I'm not allers thus. Sometimes I've got on better clo'es than these hyer, an' sometimes I've got on wuss. But, shucks! clo'es don't make the man. Tell me about her."

Thus commanded, Bloucher related all he knew, the fire king listening with rapt interest:

"Well, her right name's Jessie Burnaby, and her home's out here a ways on a ranch. She had hardly been in Salt Lake till a month or two ago. A travelin' elder heard her sing, and through his influence she was brought here and put on the stage. She made a hit—a wonderful hit; and since then she's had half the young men of Salt Lake madly in love with her."

"Actually," and Bloucher glared drunkenly at the entrance opening toward the street, "I've had to stand there an' keep them back by main strength, so resolved were some of them to see her."

"An' she hain't a-carin' nothin' for these fools?" Flotsam asked. "Ye see, if she is, my cake's dough."

"No; but it's dough, anyway, old man, for she's a got a lover here in the company that she thinks the world of. And"—here he lowered his voice to a whisper and glanced cautiously about—"there's another feller after her, whose got a pile o' money and a big swing of influence, and he'd get ahead of you, even if the boy had no show."

An eager look was in the face of the fire-king, observing which Bloucher collapsed suddenly and refused to say more until after he had again lost his caution through the influence of another drink.

Though Flotsam drank each time with him from the same bottle, yet so remarkable were his nerves of iron that no effect was perceptible.

"Who is this man o' money?" Flotsam questioned.

"The Duke of Deseret, the richest man

in all Utah!" the drunken actor whispered, putting his mouth close to Flotsam's ear. "He's a special friend o' mine; and I'm to help him work a little scheme!"

He checked himself again, and would say no more, save that the duke had tried the previous evening to gain the good graces of the vocalist, and having failed was now fully resolved on something desperate.

In a corner near them, Flotsam had the chemicals and other materials with which he performed his tricks of magic. He had placed them there near the dressing-room, for a purpose, as will be made apparent hereafter.

He had not been as ignorant of some things as he had made Bloucher think. In fact, if Bloucher could have known the thoughts constantly passing through the brain beneath the horned cap, he would have been astonished; ay! more, he would have been terrified!

The fire-king was not to take the boards until after the final appearance of Irene Imboden.

He could see the young girl, now and then, as she flitted about behind the scenes, and his gaze always rested on her face with peculiar and marked interest. She did not once dream of this, having, in truth, given the magician very little attention.

Nearly a week had gone by since the interview between Bloucher and Mix, and no movement had been made against her by either. Mix had contrived to see her nearly every evening, but never alone, as she always had some one with her. His advances had been coldly met and repulsed, and his anger had grown constantly because of it.

Young Lanyard was still a member of the stock company at this theater, holding his old position; and, though the days had slipped by, he had heard no more on the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

He had firmly told his father that he did not intend to obey the "call," and the matter had seemingly dropped there. He could not, however, convince himself that he was to get off so easily, and was constantly on the alert for danger.

Bloucher's head had fallen on the table in a semi-stupor, and he had become oblivious to what was occurring around him. The confusion behind the scenes faded from his mind, and he was for the time being but a senseless lump of clay.

Flotsam studied him intently for a few minutes. Then satisfied apparently with the results of his scrutiny, he got up and moved quietly to the point where the chemicals had been deposited.

He had observed Bloucher deposit something among them, and he now saw it and lifted it up to the light.

A queer look sat for a moment on his thin face.

"The fiends!" he growled. "They ought to be made to take some of their own medicine!"

With this, he drew some liquid from a recess, and, substituting a bottle, placed it at the point from which he had taken the other!

There was a second bottle near, containing the pretended wine which the buccaneer was to offer to his bride when the proper time came. The buccaneer was Bloucher, now in drunken sleep; and the captured bride who was to receive the wine from his hands was Miss Imboden.

"They're very cute!" Flotsam muttered, sarcastically. "They'll ruin her voice and her beauty, and then charge it to the diabolical chemicals of the fire-king, which strangely chanced to be near. A very pretty plot!"

Again there was a substitution of bottles; after which he returned to the table, where Bloucher was by this time snoring profoundly.

Flotsam shook him by the shoulder; and, when he had succeeded in arousing him, handed him a glass containing some liquor.

"Better wake up!" he urged. "Yer time ter trip the gleesome boards is mighty nigh at hand, and there'll be wailin' an' yow-yowin' in the disapp'nted orjince if you don't come forrad. Take this hyer, an' it'll swipe them cobwebs frum yer head in a jiffy."

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Bloucher gulped down the liquor.

In a little while its good effects were per-

ceptible in a brightening of his features. The fumes of the brandy, or the effects of the drug if drug had been given him passed quickly away; and long before the time came for his appearance before the foot-lights he was in proper trim for his work.

That he had been drugged by the fire-king never once entered his head.

It was an extremely lively, as well as an amusing scene—that in which the buccaneer claimed his bride; and the players seemed that night in even better voice and spirits than usual. The catchy songs of the Pirate's Bride were sweet and "taking" beyond description.

The fire-king, from his position behind the scenes, watched it all in subdued and thoughtful admiration. He seemed to feel that something was about to occur. Some tragedy, or *contretemps*.

At the bidding of her new lord and master, Miss Imboden lifted the wine goblet to her lips. She started with a scream; then she reeled backward, in her fall knocking down a big bottle, which deluged her face with its contents.

No one noticed that the villainous Bloucher gave the big bottle a tip at the right time, and even guided its fall.

A shivering moan of pain and terror came from the prostrate form of the girl.

All was instant excitement. The audience instinctively knew something was wrong. Numbers of them had witnessed the play on the occasions of its previous presentations, and knew that this was not a part of it. Some accident had occurred;—just what they could not determine.

And so they climbed upon the seats, with excited outcries, and ran hither and thither and scrambled over each other like a lot of scared animals.

The confusion on the stage was almost equally as great. The players grouped themselves about the fallen form of Miss Imboden. Some of the women were wringing their hands in dismay and uttering mournful cries.

An excitable individual somewhere in front started the cry of "Fire!" and a panic resulted—men and women treading on each other in their frantic efforts to reach the doors.

Flotsam, the fire-king, who had leaped forward as soon as he was sure matters had gone wrong, now pressed through the frantic crowd on the stage.

"There's devil's work here!" was his muttered exclamation. "I've been tricked. They got hold of the right bottle, I'm afraid, after all!"

With this, and without so much as saying "by your leave!" to the agitated players, he picked the fallen woman up in his strong arms, glanced keenly into her face, and poured some liquor from a bottle between her teeth.

Then he felt himself pulled violently, and looking around beheld the Duke of Deseret standing at his elbow.

"Give me the young lady, please!" Mix commanded. "I've a carriage here and will take her straight to the office of a physician. There don't seem to be any doctor here!"

A crowding, fighting, wild mob had possession of the theater by this time, for many from the audience had mounted to the stage for the purpose of making their way out by the rear entrance. Amid this mob Flotsam saw the face and form of young Lanyard as he struggled desperately to reach the woman he loved.

Then Flotsam was hurled backward, half falling over the extended foot of Bloucher, who was apparently coming to his assistance.

Shortly thereafter the tumult had subsided; the shrieking throngs had disappeared; and the stage and wings were clear.

Bloucher scrambled up, cut and bleeding, and stared into the battered faces of the friends who were still there. But nowhere did he see Flotsam!

And the girl and her lover were also gone.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND PRISON BARS.

MARK LANYARD, fighting fiercely to gain the side of the woman he loved and whom he feared had received a mortal injury, saw her lifted up in the arms of Flotsam.

Then all vision was shut out by a soft substance that fell in a cloudy veil over his head. His hands told him that it was a netting of cloth, or something similar. He did not know by what agency it had come there, but he recognized its presence as perilous, and strove to throw it off.

The screams and cries of the stampeding people resounded in his ears, drowning every other sound, and he felt himself thrown down again and again.

Then a gust of wind blowing against the enveloping folds told him he was out of the big building.

Once more he fought frantically, but only to be banged heavily over the head, and harshly commanded to keep still on pain of death.

He knew then that his peril was indeed great, though even yet he could not imagine what its character might be.

But he thought not so much of himself as of the woman whose needs had seemed so extreme, and whom he had vainly tried to reach and aid.

If he had had time to ponder on his own position, he would have had much to give him most serious concern, for he had lived long enough in Salt Lake to know that mysterious disappearances were not wholly unknown, even at this late day.

He strove again to cast aside the smothering veil, but was again rudely handled; and before he had time for further thought or effort, he was bundled hastily into a carriage.

This set off up the street at a rapid pace, and, after traveling for hours, as it appeared to his anxious mind, came to a stand.

Here he was lifted out, veiled as before, and with bonds added. He felt himself borne up a pathway, into a house, and along a corridor.

These abductors had so far not uttered a word by which he might identify them. Neither did they do so, now, but pushed open a door, shoved him through it, and, after locking it, went away.

He succeeded in working out of the cords that confined his wrists, and threw off the veil.

He was in utter darkness, and in a strange room, as he speedily discovered. The door—there was but one—was strongly bolted, and the one window was barred.

A faint ray of light came through it, and by its aid he strove to look about. He saw a garden holding a few stunted shrubs, a high inclosing adobe wall, beyond which rose some houses. The locality was unfamiliar.

There was a bed and a chair in the room, the only furniture it contained. He threw himself on the bed after a time, though he had no desire to sleep, and endeavored to comprehend what had befallen him and the causes leading up to it. But he could not pursue the subject because of obtruding thoughts of Irene.

Were they both the victims of a plot? he asked himself, only to receive no satisfactory reply.

He could not make it out; and, groaning aloud in his despair, cowered on the bed to await the slow coming of day.

He straightened up, with a beating heart, as a footstep sounded in the corridor. Some one was approaching the door of his prison.

A key turned in the lock, the rays of a lamp chased out the gloom, the door swung half-open, and a man entered. He relocked the door after him and stood with his back against the wall, silently contemplating the unhappy inmate.

The impulse was strong on Lanyard to spring on him and wrench away the key to the door, but the words of the visitor checked the design.

Mark recognized the man, also, as one who was high in the secrets and counsels of the Church, and thought it wise to hear first what he had to communicate.

"I presume you know why this misfortune has overtaken you?" the man questioned, in harsh tones.

"I only know I want to get out of here!" Mark replied, with steady gaze. "I am the victim of some diabolical conspiracy; I feel that, and I demand my release."

"When you have consented to implicit obedience you can go from here. Until then these walls will hold you as a prisoner."

The young man grew deathly pale.

"And do you mean to tell me that that is the order of the presidency? That I am held here like a felon because I did not leap away to do their bidding?"

The man bowed an assent.

"Then I tell you that you're a liar! There isn't a word of truth in what you've said! You're setting up a wall to screen your cowardly self behind. I know that no such fiendish order has ever been issued."

"You, and a lot more like you, are constantly committing villainies and leaving the reproach of them at the door of the Church. But there'll come a day of reckoning!"

He was becoming so heated that the man cautiously drew open the door to facilitate a retreat should it seem necessary.

"Bah!" and Mark looked at him scornfully. "I wouldn't soil my fingers with so dirty a dog! When I strike, I'll strike men! As for you, you're only a coyote; a miserable, slinking cur; a scoundrel without enough heart and courage to supply a whimpering prairie-dog!"

The fellow appeared to shrink into littleness under these lashing words.

"Do you mean to tell me that my father would be privy to a thing like this? for, of course, if it's as you say, it could not occur without his consent."

The man was silent, apparently fearing to speak.

"Do you declare unto me that my father had a hand in this, because I disobeyed his commands?"

The man indicated an affirmative.

"That's enough! Away with you! Get out of here with your poisonous lies, before I am tempted to lay violent hands on you!"

He half arose, as if to make good his threat; and the terrified villain—for he was a thorough villain, masking his evil deeds under a cloak of assumed piety—staid not on the order of his going, but went.

Mark leaped after him with the intention of snatching away the key to the prison, but the door was slammed in his face, and he heard the ominous click of the key in the lock.

Then he became frantic in his rage, and beat on the door like one who had suddenly gone mad.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD TRICK.

For two days Mark Lanyard saw no one; save a servant, who, thrice daily, poked open the door a few inches and inserted a lot of stale food.

He had tried every possible plan to break out, but had failed, and was growing desperate.

"'Bout time you was a-givin' up this blamed nonsense and comin' down to reason, hain't it?" the servant questioned one morning, pushing a shaggy head through after the unsavory morsels. "I'm gittin' tired o' this hyer, an' I 'low you're a good bit tireder."

There was in the tone something to invite speech, and perhaps confidences.

Mark, who had been about to launch himself on the shaggy head, through sheer desperation, thought better of it, and placed a coin in the fellow's hand.

"If you'll show me the way out of here, I'll make it well worth your while!" he coaxed.

The man lifted a pair of brutal, bleared eyes.

"Couldn't do it, boss," he averred. "It would be as much as my head is wu'th, to say nothin' o' a payin' posh. I calc'lare you don't reely know wot kind o' men you're a-dealin' with. They ain't a tender lay-out, now I tell ye."

He appeared to be on his guard against any sign of treachery, and was ready, as Mark could see, to hurl to the door and vanish on the instant, should he deem it necessary.

The fact that his fingers closed lovingly around the coin was, however, a hopeful indication, and Mark continued:

"It's claimed that I'm held here by order of the Church authorities because I didn't leap away to do their bidding in a certain little matter. Is it so?"

The man thrust his tongue against his cheek and winked.

Mark had felt all along that this was a falsehood, and that he was the victim of a plot or private grudge having no connection whatever with religious affairs. The fellow's look and action showed him, now, that he had guessed aright.

"I was sure it was a lie!" he continued. "So sure that I could not for a moment harbor the story. If I could get word to my father of my whereabouts and condition he would come to my rescue."

He advanced earnestly and uttered the last in a low voice.

The man did not move from his position nor relax his vigilance.

"What would it be worth to you to take such a letter for me? If you could not go yourself, you could, no doubt, easily arrange it."

"What will it be wu'th to you?" and again the tongue was thrust into the cheek and the significant wink was given.

"I've only twenty dollars here; but I'll give you that, and fifty on top of it if you'll help me in this."

The frowsy head was for a moment withdrawn, and Mark could tell that the owner of the head was making a careful survey of the approaches to the corridor, and listening to ascertain if any one was near or approaching.

The head came through the doorway once more, a crafty smile on the brutal lips.

"Money down is better'n a bushel o' promises. Chuck that twenty into my fist, and yer watch along of it, and I'm yer man. And don't be too slow with yer scribblin' B'ilie down wot ye've got to say, fer some one may come along hyer an' block the game."

Lanyard was in such a state of nervous excitement over this almost unexpected good-luck that he could hardly control his nerves sufficiently to write. Nevertheless, he scribbled a hasty note, and thrust it, with the money and the watch, into the filthy extended paw.

Then the hand and the head vanished, and the door swung to on its heavy hinges.

Now, this was all a part of a clever trick played by the Duke of Deseret for the purpose of more fully throwing Mark Lanyard into his power!

The frowsy-headed servant had been carefully coached as to what he should do and say, and the result had been as the duke had anticipated.

Mix was in a room of the same building, awaiting the result of the ruse; so the servant went directly to him with the note and the watch. But he was a shrewd scoundrel and pocketed the bill for himself. The watch could not be sold without danger of getting him into difficulty, and the note was current anywhere.

The duke took the note from the man's hands and glanced eagerly over it, a smile of satisfaction lighting his puffy face.

"That's good!" was his ejaculation; and he thereupon took pen, ink and paper from a drawer, and proceeded with wonderful skill to draft a letter to the elder Lanyard which should have every indication of having been penned by Mark.

It was a penitent-toned letter, in which the young man was represented as being much distressed because of his lack of filial respect, and conscience-smitten for his lack of prompt obedience to the commands of his superiors.

It ended with the declaration that he had done all he could to repair the evil by starting for England, where he purposed to remain until recalled by the proper authorities.

"Dear father," it concluded, "please do not think too harshly of me for thus leaving without a parting 'good-by'; but indeed I feel that my sins have been so grievous that I cannot look you in the face, and prefer not to see you until I have in full measure atoned for my willfulness and disobedience."

It was signed, "Your affectionate son, Mark Lanyard;" and so cleverly was the signature copied that Mark himself would have had some difficulty in believing he did not write it.

The duke gave to the task much pains and time, feeling it to be worth all the labor he could put on it.

Then, when it was finished, he sent it off by the servant who had had the interview

with Mark; a servant, who, in callousness of heart and viciousness of mind, was a fit subordinate for such a scoundrel.

The elder Lanyard received the letter; and, though he read it with surprise and even astonishment, he did not for a moment question its genuineness. He was not wholly pleased with it; and was inclined to feel hard and angry toward Mark for having departed in that unceremonious fashion.

And thus the prisoner's effort at liberty served only to thrust him deeper into the toils of the Duke of Deseret.

CHAPTER VII.

A WELL-MEANT PLAN MISCARRIES.

FERGUS FLOTSAM kicked open the door of a small adobe dwelling, and with considerable precipitation hurried inside. His long linen coat flapped about his heels, concealing from the view of any chance passer his slashed doublet and silken hose. The battered hat resting on his head also hid the clownish ears which pointed so grotesquely upward. More, the flapping coat aided in the concealment of the burden he carried.

This burden he deposited gently on a cot, after he had hurled to the door with his foot; and a glance now served to show that it was the unconscious singer, Irene Imboden. A ray of moonlight filtered through the small panes of the old-fashioned window, set in the "'doby" wall, and fell full on her white, drawn face.

The reader need scarcely be told that the time was immediately after the panic and the exciting events occurring in the theater on that momentous night.

How Flotsam had succeeded in breaking through the crazy mob he could not have himself told. He had caught up the girl, poured a little of the liquor in the black bottle down her throat, satisfied himself she was not dead, and had then fought his way to the entry and out into the street, holding her firmly in his strong arms.

His acts, strange as they may seem, were not without a sufficient, and all-powerful motive. He had his reasons for thinking he knew more of this girl, of her past and present, than she knew herself. And he had likewise strong reasons for wishing to aid and protect her, aside from those natural ones which prompt every man to tender his services to a woman in distress.

Notwithstanding that he had been forced to press his way through a great mass of humanity in his efforts to gain the street and this place of security, he was satisfied he had not been sufficiently observed for any one to determine who he was or the direction he had chosen.

All were too much engrossed in looking after their own safety to give heed to the doings of another.

"There's life in her yet!" he observed, with a pant of satisfaction, as he bent for a moment above her.

Then he lifted her again, and poured some more of the contents of the black bottle between her ashy lips.

It was the bottle from which he and the actor, Bloucher, had drank so freely. But it is scarcely necessary to say that the liquid forced between her lips was not of the character which Bloucher had swallowed.

In short, the bottle was a "trick" one, such as magicians make frequent use of in their public performances. It had three compartments: one containing pure liquor, the second a liquor drugged, and the third only colored water. The drugged liquor had been imbibed by Bloucher, the colored water by Flotsam, and now the pure liquor was being given to the unconscious girl as a reviving stimulant.

Not content with this, Flotsam brought forth from some recess in his coat a small vial. He poured a drop or two of its contents into a glass of water, and held it to the girl's lips. She swallowed it with difficulty, her throat seeming fevered and parched.

"They didn't give her the stuff they meant to, nor they didn't give her the harmless wine I prepared for them. No, that last would have been too lucky! They got hold of some of that infernal fire preparation, and that's what she drank! She'll have a sore throat for a few days, but she'll pull through all right, and her voice won't be injured."

He smiled pleasedly, as he observed that no burn disfigured the satiny skin of her face. Bloucher, half drunk and blundering as he had been, had, in this instance, taken the bottle "fixed" for him by the magician; and, though the contents had been hurled in the girl's face with devilish intent, no harm had resulted.

The good effects of the last draught were soon manifest. The girl struggled and moaned, and placed a hand to her throat. Then she came back to the land of sensibility, and, rising to a sitting posture, stared about in blank bewilderment.

She could not at once recall the occurrences of the past few minutes; and, though she saw and recognized Flotsam, the apartment and its belongings were so strange that she felt she must be dreaming.

"I low you're all right, little one!" in a tone of fatherly kindness. "A bit rattled and turned round in the upper story, eh? But that'll pass off d'reckly. Take another sup o' this."

He again poured some of the contents of the vial into a glass, liberally diluted it, and gave it to her. She drank it off without question, still too dazed and uncertain of herself and her surroundings to offer a protest.

The mists faded from her mind and she looked about more keenly.

"Where am I, and what has happened?" was her anxious question.

As she said this she looked at him with a dark suspicion clouding her mind.

"You have tried to poison me, Mr. Flotsam!" and her words were full of reproach. "My throat is burning up. You've given me some of that fire you're so fond of eating!"

She sprung to her feet unsteadily, and bent on him a burning glance.

"Set down!" he requested, endeavoring to soothe her. "You'll recollect everything d'reckly, an' then you won't think so hard of me. Do set down."

His tones were kindly imperious, and she obeyed mechanically.

"What I gave you will do you good," he went on. "It was the actor, Bloucher, who tried to harm ye, when he handed you the wine to drink in the play. But, we'll not talk about that now," seeing that her ideas were still confused. "What you want is a place to rest, an' where you'll be safe fer awhile."

"There ain't any better than right hyer. I fixed this up a day er two ago, thinking it'd come handy to me in my work. Everybody thinks this ole 'doby is deserted; which makes it all the better fer me, and fer you! I'll go out an' git a woman to come hyer an' look after ye, an' then you'll feel to home an' all right."

She stopped him with an impatient gesture and a declaration that her throat was on fire and she could no longer endure it.

He gave her a glass of water, into which he had dropped an impalpable powder.

"You'll feel better after that!"

He drew close to her, placing his chair against the cot. His gaze was strangely earnest.

"I'd call ye Miss Imboden, on'y I know that ain't yer name? What is yer right name, anyway? We're both of the same profesh; an' so understand that stage people are li'ble to have 'most any name 'ceptin' of that they give to the public. Now my handle may be a dozen things besides Fergus Flotsam!"

At first she seemed disposed not to answer the question. Finally she murmured, "Burnaby! Jessie Burnaby!" and yawned frightfully in a vain effort to throw off the extremely sleepy feeling that assailed her.

"I guess she don't know her true name!" was his under-thought, continuing to bestow on her that strange look. "How it would startle her if I should tell her what I think. But, it isn't time, yet. There are some points to be settled. There is other work now. The first thing to do always, is the thing that needs doin' first! Just at this minute, that's to look up a woman who'll act a mother to this child for a few days."

Strange thoughts moved him, as he sat there so quietly. Nor did he change his position, until her head drooped and she reclined again in a sleeping condition on

the cot. Then he got up and moved to the door.

He drew it softly after him and stepped into the dark and empty street. Temple street and Main were not the masses of business blocks they are now; and his gaze rested on only low residences of adobe set in the midst of extensive gardens. From none of them proceeded a light.

Satisfied there was little chance of observation, he slipped away along the silent thoroughfare.

He was gone longer than he intended, but it was still quite dark in the streets when he returned. Great was his consternation on again entering the house. It was deserted. The song-bird had flown from her cage!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOVE IN THE FOWLER'S NET.

THE opiate had not been as potent as Flotsam thought, for he had been absent but a short time when Jessie Burnaby returned slowly to an uncertain consciousness of her position. Her mind had not cleared of its fogs; and, when she saw she was alone, a crafty light gleamed in her eyes.

The feeling was strong on her that Flotsam was an enemy; that he had tried to poison her with some of the hellish admixtures he made use of in his acting tricks; and that, therefore, she was consulting her own safety by getting out of his power as soon as she could.

So she crept stealthily to the door, drew it carefully open, and, observing no one in the street, hurried out and away.

She did not recognize the locality and had no clear idea of where she desired to go; but hastened on with that undefined fear urging her into constant exertion.

At length she sat down on a bit of curb, tired and depressed, and still uncertain of where she was.

She had not been there long until a woman came softly along the street toward her. This woman had emerged from a large dark house set well back in one of those big gardens so common in the City of the Saints. Her movements made it plain that she had seen the girl and meant to speak to her.

"I don't know you!" said Jessie, looking up frankly, when the woman addressed her.

"No; but you know Major Mix! He sent me to tell you you could find shelter there."

She pointed toward the house.

The woman was a keen-eyed, unscrupulous creature, and Jessie's tones had revealed to her that the girl was in a state of dazed helplessness.

"Major Mix?" Jessie questioned.

"Yes," again looking at her sharply, "and he sent me out to aid you. You seem lost, and you're in danger. The major is a friend of yours. Not a better friend have you in Salt Lake. Will you come with me? I can take you where these enemies will not find you."

This last because Jessie had spoken incoherently of being pursued.

"If you only will!" and the poor, harassed creature sighed plaintively. "I am so tired, and I've traveled so far, and my head feels as if it would burst."

Major Marlton Mix rubbed his pudgy hands together, when, from a window of the building, he observed that the woman had succeeded in inducing Jessie to accompany her.

He preferred to accomplish his ends by strategy rather than force, and he was determined to get this girl in his power. If he could do it and at the same time make her think him a friend and protector, so much the better for his plans and his hopes.

When the plot against her failed—and he was not yet clear as to how and why it had failed—he had set spies to watching the principal streets. Hence it was not mere accident which caused the woman to observe Jessie.

As the reader has guessed, there was a deep, underlying motive in the acts of the Duke of Deseret. It has been seen, from the duke's evident fear of her when he saw her on the stage for the first time, that he felt her presence to be a menace to him.

All of which now needs a word of explanation.

The man had won his title of Duke of Deseret from a magnificent estate in the interior of the country, where he had a wonderful house, well drilled servants, and lived a life of luxury throughout the greater part of the year. He was immensely wealthy, so it was said; and it was further said brought his wealth with him to Utah from England.

In the latter country, it was alleged, he had been in the army, and had seen service in some of England's wars, where he had won his major's spurs.

In all these stories there was a grain of truth, mixed with much error. The duke had come from England, and had brought money with him; but the money was not rightfully his own. He had been in the army, but had not sufficiently distinguished himself to rise from the ranks, and had quitted the service in disgrace.

This last, however, was not the chief reason that kept him from a desire to return to the tight little island beyond the sea. His hands were not guiltless of the blood of a fellow-creature, and to murder, there had been added robbery of the basest sort.

Two small English heiresses had been mixed up in the affair. As their presence in England would have been a source of constant menace to him, he had brought them with him to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, where he soon conveniently lost them, when he found he could not use them further. That had been several years since, and he was certain that the new singer was one of the lost heiresses.

For him her appearance was, at this time, most inopportune. Her mother before her had been an opera singer—at one period the pride and delight of the music-loving public of London. The Utah singer had not only inherited her mother's voice, but her very looks and tricks of manner.

The resemblance was in fact so marked, that the Duke of Deseret was sure that any one who had seen the mother and heard her sing would recognize Miss Imboden as her daughter, at a glance.

And what made him especially fearful was that word had reached him that Nemesis was on his track, and now journeying from England at the best speed of ocean vessel, railway car, and stage coach. He might be at that very moment in Salt Lake City! Ay! he might already have listened to the charming notes of this new song bird!

Major Mix did not, however, regard this as at all likely, though it might be classed among the possibilities, and therefore he deemed it most important to get the new opera-singer off the stage and out of the country before the coming of the man he so feared.

For so long had Mix rested in fancied security, that the sudden knowledge that an avenger was on his track thoroughly unnerved him. He had thought that avenger dead in the wilds of a far distant country, and to know that he was very much alive and speeding westward for the express purpose of hunting down the man who had so cruelly wronged him, caused Mix to tremble.

There was one thing that gave him courage—he knew he had changed much in those passing years, and that would serve as a protection, in a measure. Besides, he had never seen the man he had wronged, and it was safe to assume this man had never seen him. Therefore, any old pictures the man might have collected to assist in the work of identification could only be misleading.

Then, too, the duke wore a different name from that borne in England.

But he had quickly decided that there was one thing he must do, if he would assure himself of perfect safety—he must remove Irene Imboden temporarily from the theater of action there in Salt Lake City; by strategy, if it could be so done; if not, then by force. Nemesis must not be allowed to see her face.

And to accomplish that it seemed necessary to remove also the young amateur actor who had fallen so violently in love with her. He thought he had accomplished this when he secured the order directing Mark to go to England. Mark had not gone, and the diabolical scheme against the girl had likewise miscarried.

Thereupon the duke's desperation grew, for each day brought nearer and nearer the man he feared.

There were other thoughts stirring the

duke, as will be seen by and by, but enough has been revealed to show the real animus of his seemingly eccentric movements.

"Ten thousand curses on that young fool, Lanyard!" he growled. "He might have packed himself off obediently and simplified things. But he'll find who he's trifling with after a while, and perhaps he won't be so fresh!"

He smiled pleasedly, even amid his growls, as he watched Jessie following the woman up the street.

"I wish I knew which I'd better do—keep her here or send her away! Maybe time will decide. I've made one score to-night, anyway!"

Irene Imboden, or Jessie Burnaby, as she usually called herself, walked after the woman through the gate and down the long stretch of tree-bordered walk. Her head was still in a whirl, and her confusion of ideas rendered her over-trustful. She did not dream of being deceived by one of her own sex.

Major Mix had withdrawn from his point of observation, and was not seen when the two women entered the house.

"Now, you'll be safe from those dreadful men!" the woman assured her, as she led her to a pleasantly-furnished room at the rear of the building. "I'm your friend; and you can feel safe here. You may call me Mother Magnus, if you please; and I'll be a mother to you, you poor dear! How tired you must be, and how frightened! It must have been dreadful to be out wandering the streets at this time of night!"

"You are so good, Mother Magnus!" Jessie murmured, sinking into a convenient chair. "And, oh! I am so sleepy!"

The influence of the opiate was still strong on her, and was making itself felt again, now that a sense of security invested her.

"Lie right down there!" urged Mother Magnus, preparing a place for her.

And when Jessie had yieldingly obeyed, she hurried away to report her great good luck to Major Mix.

CHAPTER IX.

A DASTARDLY SHOT.

To say that Flotsam was nonplussed by the disappearance of Jessie Burnaby puts it mildly.

After assuring himself she was not in the house, he hurried into the streets and instituted a hasty but thorough search. Not until the coming of day did he return to the adobe, depressed by his failure and in a sober and cogitative mood.

He did not believe that Jessie had wandered forth alone, but was impressed with the idea that some one, some enemy, had discovered her presence in the adobe and had borne her away.

To his mind there was but one man in Salt Lake City who would do that, and that man was Major Marlton Mix—and the fire-king had many good and abundant reasons, not yet apparent, for laying the act at Mix's door.

His first thought being of Mix, he set himself to watch that individual, to discover if possible what had been done with Miss Burnaby. But, Mix was a wary old fox; and in all respects quite as shrewd as was the detective who was shadowing him. Hence, nothing came of the espionage, though it was kept up through several days.

In addition to this, Flotsam paid a hasty visit to the office of the elder Lanyard, which was located near the big Mormon printing house.

Lanyard was much surprised to learn that his son was not to be found in the city; but as he could give no information concerning his whereabouts, the information obtained there did not materially aid the puzzled fire-king.

From Lanyard's office, the detective passed through the Eagle Gate—so called from the big bronze eagle surmounting it—and approached the private office of the great head of the church, the prophet, Brigham Young.

He had great respect for Young, recognizing him as a man of remarkable ability. But Young could tell him no more than could the elder Lanyard of the whereabouts of the missing young man; and seemed irri-

tated and annoyed at being questioned on so trivial a subject.

Flotsam, however, had another motive, in addition to the apparent one, for this visit. It was to test and weigh the character of the "prophet," and thereby ascertain if possible how Young would stand should the detective come to an open fight with Mix.

Day by day did Flotsam continue this futile search for the girl and her lover; only to confess at last that all his efforts were failures. They had disappeared as completely as if they had been swallowed by the great salt sea. Nor did the communication from the elder Lanyard to the effect that Mark had departed suddenly for England, throw any light on the subject. He felt that the communication was a deceptive one, probably emanating from Major Mix; for his researches had shown him that Lanyard was not wholly free from Mix's evil influence.

In fact, by putting two and two together, he arrived at the conclusion that the instructions ordering Mark to England for a term of years came originally from Mix, and their passage by the presidency had been secured by Mark's father at Mix's behest.

It seemed a singular conclusion, but to Flotsam's mind the proofs sustained it.

Even the newspapers appeared to have felt the pressure of Mix's money, for they had published statements to the effect that the promising young singer, Miss Irene Imboden, had been seriously burned by chemicals used by the fire-king, and had in consequence gone home for awhile.

There were intimations, too, covert and veiled, for the editors probably felt they were treading on perilous ground, to the effect that the fire-king could not be held wholly blameless for this unheard-of "accident."

In view of these publications, Flotsam was not a little surprised at the request, which came one day, that he should again appear at the theater in his acts of prestidigitation.

He went with something of a feeling that Mix was responsible for this sudden summons, but resolved to ascertain what it meant.

The request seemed genuine and honest. The attendance had wonderfully fallen off since the disappearance of the favorite singer, and the manager represented himself as anxious to do something to revive the waning interest. There was no stronger "card" in the town, he believed, than the fire-king; hence, he desired Flotsam to reappear on the boards.

"What has become of Miss Imboden, if I may be allowed to question?" and Flotsam looked the manager squarely in the eye.

The latter returned the look without faltering:

"Why, she's gone home for a time. I thought you knew that. You must have seen the papers!"

Flotsam knew she had done nothing of the kind, for he had taken pains to visit the ranch in the guise of a wandering herder; but he did not contradict the manager's statement, and turned away as if satisfied.

The house was crowded on the night of Flotsam's reappearance. His fame as a magician had been widely spread; and besides, many were drawn by an idle curiosity to see the man whose deadly chemicals had consigned to limbo so promising a singer as Miss Imboden.

The manager sat in his place, pleased and smiling, as Flotsam began his really wonderful performance. The fire-king was a master of the art of deception, and had so trained his hands that his tricks defied the keenest scrutiny.

A cage, containing a live canary, was set on the table, covered with a cloth, and when the cloth was whisked away, cage and bird had both disappeared.

There were certain wise ones present who declared the cage to be made out of paper, which crushed under a touch; and that the canary had an invisible string tied to one of its legs—a string of rubber, by which it was instantly drawn up the wizard's sleeve and out of sight. But these wise ones could not attest that their eyes caught the trick, nor did any of them venture to duplicate it.

Plants were made to grow beneath baskets set on the floor, after the manner of the jugglers of Hindostan. A boy was stabbed

through and through by a keen-edged sword; and, though blood was seen to flow from the frightful wound, the sword was withdrawn without leaving so much as a scratch. And neither the boy nor the audience could tell for a certainty how it was done.

Tracings and writings of fire leaped out from the walls, and disappeared at the wizard's command, eggs were made to hatch full-grown pigeons, with gold rings and watches tied to their necks; and all under the very eyes of the bewildered auditors!

But, space forbids to enumerate the half of the marvels done there that night, nor is it necessary.

Flotsam's performance was drawing to a satisfactory close, when a request was made by some one from the audience for a repetition of the "musket trick."

It was a trick which had been greatly favored, and when its repetition was suggested on this evening, the suggestion met with hearty approval and the calls grew loud and persistent.

Flotsam was willing to comply, for it was a trick not difficult of performance, and perfectly harmless to the performer if carefully worked.

It consisted in firing a musket, apparently loaded with ball, at the head of the magician, who seemingly caught the flying missile in his mouth.

The musket was produced, the leaden ball passed around for inspection, after which the gun was loaded by some well-known citizen. But, the Wizard was always sure, before the act had got that far, that he had substituted a bullet which looked like lead for the real one. This seeming leaden bullet was a chemical compound which flew into harmless powder at the moment of the explosion; and to finish the trick and bewilder the spectators it was only necessary for the performer to produce from between his teeth the real bullet, which he had previously and surreptitiously placed there.

The musket was loaded and the man stood ready to fire it at the head of the smiling magician. The audience was stilled by that breathless hush of expectancy noticeable when a supposed dangerous feat is about to be performed.

Then the gun belched its contents.

A cry of horror arose. Instead of stepping smiling forward with the bullet between his teeth, the fire-king had dropped to the floor, and blood was seen to be flowing from a wound in his temple.

The excitement almost equaled that on the occasion of the accident to the new singer. Women screamed in fright, and men even scrambled to their feet in a desire to learn what had happened; and the people from the wings hurried to the fallen man.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY OF THE BIG ADOBE.

THE show had ended abruptly—almost as abruptly as on that previous occasion when the singer had fallen moaningly to the boards.

The stage was deserted, save for the presence of a few supernumeraries.

These were speaking in awed whispers of a mysterious figure, cloaked in black, that had leaped away at the moment of the musket-shot, holding in his hand a smoking pistol. The figure had been hidden somewhere, it was hinted, in the depths of that cavernous region lying behind the footlights; but who he was, or how he came there, or what were his intentions in firing that shot—for they were sure he had fired one—they could not say.

But Flotsam, the fire-king, had seen that figure and had recognized it. At the moment the musket belched its contents he had caught sight of it, though the sight came too late to enable him to avoid the ball from the weapon that he saw flash upward. But it had enabled him to give a quick jerk of his head, and thus save his life, for the pistol-ball, instead of penetrating his brain, as it assuredly would have done, merely grazed his temple.

Blood flowed from the wound, and he fell, temporarily unconscious, leading the spectators to think him dead. But the unconsciousness was only momentary. Before the people from the wings could reach him he

leaped to his feet again and sped after the man who had fired the murderous shot.

That man he knew to be Major Mix, and the knowledge made clear a good many things that had been puzzling.

It showed that Mix was at the bottom of his recall to the theater, that he was responsible for the demand made for a repetition of the musket trick, and, furthermore, that under cover of this trick Mix had deliberately planned to kill him.

As an evidence of the desperation to which Mix had come, nothing could have been more complete.

"Best thing that ever happened me!" the Wizard Detective muttered, as he halted for a moment near the outer door and wiped away the blood that trickled down his face. "It shows me what kind of a man I've got to fight, and is proof—the biggest kind of proof—that I haven't been firin' blank cartridges; that I'm after the right man! Mix knows what I'm up to, and he's scared; and, when you get a man scared, he's whipped!"

He could nowhere see Mix. But he saw Bloucher slip out of the theater shortly after and walk quickly up the street.

"Villains, like coyotes, hunt in pairs!" was his comment, as he slipped stealthily after the actor. "Bloucher's goin' to Mix for the purpose of givin' him the latest news frum the scene of war, or I miss my guess. Well, here goes to see the thing through."

Bloucher's actions were soon of a character to dispel any doubts the fire-king may have had on this point. The actor evidently feared he would be shadowed, and by seeking shady streets and dark alleys sought to baffle such pursuit.

But in dealing with Flotsam he had on his trail a beagle who could not readily be thrown off the scent.

Flotsam kept near him, in spite of his many twists and turns, and finally had the satisfaction of seeing him approach and enter a garden which led up to a large house.

It was the same to which young Lanyard had been taken.

A cobblestone wall, so high it could not be seen over by a man of ordinary stature, ran around this garden.

Flotsam clambered over the fence, taking care to conceal his movements by the shadows cast by a large tree, and soon after stood beneath the front wall of the building.

Bloucher had entered by the front door. The house was dark and seemingly deserted.

Flotsam made his way to its rear and stood there with his head bent in a listening attitude. No sound came to reward him.

His head was painin' him and a feeling of giddiness now and then swept over him, but he was resolved to fathom the mystery of Bloucher's movements before turning back.

Then there came to his ears the sounds of voices. He could not make out the words, which seemed to be uttered in a low and subdued manner.

A minute later there arose on the air a scream; a woman's scream!

"If that hain't the voice of the singer, then I'm a crazy Piute!" he exclaimed, pressing nearer the wall.

The scream was repeated, and he was thinking of forcing an entrance in some manner, and rushing to her assistance, for the sounds told him she deemed herself in peril, when Major Mix appeared on the small veranda above him and forced him to remain in silent seclusion.

The startling screams were not repeated; but Bloucher came out and joined Mix on the veranda and engaged him in a low-toned conversation, whose purport the concealed detective could not catch.

They remained there some time, forcing him to stay hidden; though, in his desperation, he was resolved to leap out and fight his way into the building, in spite of the consequences, should those screams rise again.

But all was quiet. Too quiet, he thought.

"I'll get some officers, an' we'll break into that place and find out the meaning of all that!" he muttered, turning toward the wall.

His head was painin' him more and more. The fiery thoughts that had seethed through it were of themselves sufficient to bring on a fever. Besides, the wound from the pistol-ball was a more serious affair than he had thought, and his neglect of it was liable to bring grave consequences. It had ceased to bleed, and he had bound a handkerchief

tightly over it, thinking to thus obtain some relief from the excruciating pain.

"We'll break that thing in, and we'll see what kind of a game Major Mix is playin' behind those walls!" was his mental declaration, as he crept away. "I'm powerful afraid something's happened to the girl. If there has, we will have a reckoning!"

The clinched hands and the fierce, black look were more deadly in their meaning than were the mere unspoken words.

Flotsam's head felt light as a cork, and he found great difficulty in surmounting the cobblestone wall, which had before given him no trouble.

He reached the street at length, painfully, and after much exertion; and then, as he turned to walk away in the gray of the early dawn, he reeled and fell senseless to the pavement.

CHAPTER XI.

IRON BARS AND LOVERS' TEARS.

JESSIE BURNABY was not long in discovering that she was virtually a prisoner.

She was in her right mind, when she came out of the sleep produced by the opiate. The burning sensation in her throat had disappeared, thanks to the remedy applied by the fire-king; and she was, except for a certain feeling of nervousness, her former self.

She had seen no one about the house but Mother Magnus, who had brought her her breakfast and spoken a few words of comfort and cheer; and, as the morning advanced, it began to appear that she was not likely to see any one.

Made uneasy by this, she went in search of the woman; and, not readily finding her, advanced to the front door, intending to take a look about the premises. To her bewilderment she found it locked.

Mother Magnus hustled up at this juncture, and smilingly explained that she usually kept it locked because of sneak-thieves.

She threw the door open at the same time, and permitted Jessie to look out.

The street was a strange one, and, she was convinced, in a remote and little-frequented part of the town.

She expressed a desire to return to her lodgings and put herself in communication with her friends of the theater, but Mother Magnus would not hear of it.

"You must stay right here until you are stronger!" she insisted. "Any word you want sent, I'll attend to."

"Send for the manager, then!" Jessie requested. "They'll want me to sing to-night, and the company mustn't be disappointed. They couldn't well go ahead with the play without me."

There was a touch of conscious pride in the words, for it was a pleasure to this country-bred girl to feel that she had attained to a position of such importance and prominence.

Her thoughts were with Mark, as she saw a servant hurry away to deliver the message that Mother Magnus had given him.

In half an hour the servant returned alone, saying that the manager would be there shortly.

But the day passed and the manager did not come.

Other messages sent the next day produced no better results, and when, grown thoroughly alarmed, she told Mother Magnus she meant to go along and make a search for her friends, the latter locked the door and dropped the bunch of jingling keys into her pocket.

"Do you mean you will not let me go?" Jessie gasped.

"That's what I mean, Miss Uppish! and if you weren't a reg'lar fool you'd 'a' seen that long ago. As long as you was quiet, I didn't think it necessary to show you the lay of the land, but you may understand, now, that you ain't a-going through that door till I say you may."

The woman's face had assumed a look of unwanted malevolence, and her words sounded like the snarls of an ill-bred dog.

Jessie reeled backward, faint and giddy, and covered her face with her hands. Her worst fears—the fears she had felt herself foolish in harboring—were realized. She was a prisoner in this out-of-the-way place.

And her jailer, though a woman, was as heartless as a fiend.

"I presume you'll explain why?" lifting her face to that of Mother Magnus. "You will not refuse to give me a reason for this—this extraordinary act?"

"There's been an attempt to kill you," and the woman returned the gaze with much apparent earnestness. "The fire-king was the agent;—but he was only the agent. An' you'll be killed, yet, if you go about as you did before."

Jessie's brain swam. Was Mother Magnus lying to her, or was there truth in the story? She recalled her fears of Flotsam, and her belief that he had given her some of the admixture used in his diabolical arts.

"Why should my life be sought?" was her sudden question.

"Ay! there you've got me! It's mixed up with lovers and church affairs; and the last, you know, is a dangerous thing to talk about!"

She had lowered her voice to a whisper, and glanced around as if fearful of eavesdropping.

Jessie rose and advanced appealingly.

"Will you not let me out, please? I'm not at all afraid of these things! I'd rather face any danger than be cooped up here!"

But Mother Magnus would not heed the appeal. She turned her back coldly on the girl, and then walked away, jingling the bunch of keys in her pocket and humming a bit of tune.

Believing that the peril, whatever it might be, emanated more from this woman and this woman's friends than from any one else, Jessie decided to give an apparent docile consent to everything and await the first opportunity of getting away.

Therefore, she crowded down all feeling of weakness, dried her starting tears, and endeavored to compose herself sufficiently to take a calm survey of the situation.

The determination to make her way out of this prison never for a moment abated; and that night, when her head pressed the pillow, it was not for sleep. She had no desire for sleep, but retreated to the little room assigned her that she might there escape the prying inquisitiveness of Mother Magnus and the more fully perfect her plans.

It was well on toward morning when she crept softly from the room. This room had not been locked, though she knew that every outer avenue of escape had been.

The adobe was a low, rambling structure, with a multiplicity of rooms reaching back among the trees of the garden.

Toward these rooms she groped her way, carefully watchful of her footsteps lest they should betray her.

She could find no egress; but while feeling about in the gloom her hands fell against the knob of a heavy door.

This she cautiously turned, though with little expectation of any result. What occurred was wholly unlooked for.

A voice reached her;—a low voice, but one whose tones caused her to thrill in every fiber of her being.

"What's wanted?" came the words.

"Oh, Mark! Can that be you?" was her quivering inquiry.

Instantly the owner of the voice leaped to his feet and stood beside the door.

"Who is it?" he questioned.

"It's me! Mel!" was her ungrammatical response. "Me; Jessie Burnaby! Oh, Mark! have you come to help me?"

Mark Lanyard reeled blindly, clutching at the door for support.

"Help you?" he quavered. "My God, Jessie! Have they got you here, too?"

She knew, then, that Mark also was a prisoner; held, as she was, for some cruel and mysterious intent.

"Oh, Mark! Mark!" and her voice rose in a sobbing wail. "May God help us! This is dreadful!"

"It's damnable!" grated Mark, wrought to a fury of anger. "It's—"

His further words were drowned by a wild scream, which fell suddenly from the lips of the girl.

"Help! Help!" she wailed; and Mark, rendered frantic by that cry, threw himself against the big door like some maddened wild beast.

Mother Magnus had been more alert and watchful than Jessie had given her credit for

being; and, though she had not heard the girl slip softly along the corridor, she did hear the whispered words and inadvertent exclamations of the lovers.

And it was Mother Magnus who now leaped on Jessie Burnaby, dragging her backward roughly and forcing that startled scream from her lips; the scream that was heard by the listening Wizard Detective, who was screened at that moment in the garden below.

CHAPTER XII. THE GNAWING OF A RAT.

"DEAR JESSIE:—

This will assure you that I am safe, and on my way to a place of security. I succeeded in breaking out of my prison last night, and have since been planning for your release. I have it all arranged at last. If a carriage calls for you to-night, do not hesitate to enter it. It will be sent by Major Mix, whom I have discovered to be a good friend to both of us. It will convey you to his country home; a point I shall make for as soon as I am sure of my plans here. There, all things willing, I'll see you again. Destroy this as soon as you've read it; and then be on your guard.

"Your own lover,
"MARK."

So ran the crumpled bit of writing which Jessie picked up near the window-ledge, where it had been tossed by a closely-muffled man, who hastened off as soon as he beheld her clutch it.

It was the morning succeeding the startling events just unfolded.

Jessie had been in a state of distraction so complete that she had not noticed the man till the moment the paper fell, with a rustle, at her feet.

Those intervening hours had been terror-filled and hideous beyond description. She had even fancied, at times, that she was going mad; even if her mind were not already unhinged. Constantly she heard Mark's voice calling to her out of the muffled gloom behind the heavy door; and such pain of body and anguish of mind was voiced by those calls that she tried to shut them out by closing the outward organs of sense.

But they came to her, then, louder and more imploringly than ever.

The reading of the note aroused her to action. She had no thought of treachery, for she instantly decided that the handwriting was unquestionably Mark's. She could not understand why it should seem necessary for him to fly thus from the city and the home of his father, though she was quite willing to believe that he knew what was best for them both. A few days had served to show that they had there many bitter and dangerous enemies.

When she had lovingly gone over the words again and again, she tore the note into shreds, chewed these into a paper pellet, and hurled it far out among the shrubbery.

Then she sat there for a long time, wondering vaguely how Mark had managed to effect his escape, and what he was doing at that moment.

"Dear Mark!" she dreamily murmured, sinking her chin in her hand. "How I do love him! and what a brave, courageous fellow he is! I wonder if these dreadful times will ever end, and we be happy together?"

But, Jessie Burnaby was a sadly deceived woman. Mark Lanyard had not escaped from his prison! The letter was another of the major's clever forgeries.

However, the knowledge that Jessie was held there even as he was, stirred Mark Lanyard to a renewal of his determination to find a way out.

The fates seemed to conspire with and aid him that morning, for a new servant was sent to the prison-room with Mark's breakfast.

Mark had, on the little finger of his left hand, a valuable ring, which had escaped the prying cupidity of this servant's predecessor. Mark now drew it off; and flashing it before the man's eyes, asked if it was sufficient to tempt him to do a small favor.

The fellow glanced at it eagerly; a glance which Mark noted with the keenest scrutiny. The look in the man's eyes decided Mark that an attempt at bribing him was at least worth risking.

"If you'll carry a note from me to my father, and bring me a small, spring saw-blade, that ring is yours!"

The man thought a moment; then bent forward to whisper his reply.

"I c'u'dn't git the saw-blade without too much resk! But I'll kerry the note; an' I'll tuck in hyer a big case-knife that mebbe you kin use. It's the best I kin promise."

Mark understood the fellow's caution. The case-knife, if found, would not serve to betray him; whereas the saw-blade would. He could claim that Mark had secreted the knife, and its absence from the tray had been unnoticed; but if the saw-blade were discovered and suspicion rested on him, the dealer from whom the blade was obtained might fasten on him the guilt.

It was not a time for haggling.

"Very well," said Mark, with manifest satisfaction. "Leave the knife here, and convey the note; and the ring's yours."

As he said it, he thrust the knife into the breast of his coat—for the meal was finished—and, after scribbling a few lines on a page torn from a note-book, folded the ring in the paper and handed both to the servant.

The latter picked up the tray, bowed and vanished.

"He's carried out one part of the contract, even if he lies about the other!" Mark thought, joyfully, as he felt the edge of the blade and fastened his eyes on the bars of the window. "This thing's as dull as a hoe; but wonders may be done with a tool no better, if the tool is backed by strength and determination. I'll get out of here, if I have to hack those bars to bits to do it!"

He got up and cautiously approached the window, and looked out at the clump of shrubbery, which cut off all view of the town. He did not need to examine the strong, wooden bars, for he had done that already, scores of times. He only wished to see if the coast were clear for him to commence work.

He had long ago convinced himself that sounds emanating from that room could not reach the street; otherwise his many calls for help must have been heard and answered. At any rate, if heard, they had never been heeded.

The garden was empty of human occupants; and he at once began to hack and saw on the stout bar beneath his hands. The cuttings he contrived to conceal beneath the mattress of his cot.

He worked at this for an hour, and was then forced to desist by the appearance of a man, who came into the garden every day at about that hour. This man usually busied himself among the plants, as if he were a gardener; but Mark instinctively felt that this was a blind, and that he was really on duty there as a guard.

There was no work for Mark that day; but with the coming of night he resumed his apparently hopeless task of cutting through the bars.

He had, however, not spent the day idly. Finding an iron brace screwed to the under side of the cot, he had succeeded in removing it, and by its aid fashioned the knife into a rude saw. This he did by nicking the knife-edge into a series of teeth.

It was a very clumsy and unsatisfactory contrivance, but for Mark it held the essence of hope. He could make better progress with it than with the smooth, dull blade; and the fierce energy with which he attacked his task gave some promise of its accomplishment.

Hour after hour he sawed and hacked at the firm wood of the bars. By midnight the first one had been cut through; and with scarcely a moment's cessation of the intense toil he began on the other.

If he could cut through that, the way to liberty would lie open before him.

He had expected some word from his father; and, as the hours had dragged by without any, he was forced to the conclusion that in the latter particular the servant had played him false. He had not been permitted to question the man concerning it, for his evening meal had been brought by another.

Only for a few moments at a time throughout all those long hours was Jessie Burnaby out of his mind. He believed her to be still in the house, in the power of their unknown and relentless foes; and his plans for effecting her release were many, and changed with every hour.

Again the hours stole on, and the insatiate knife, driven by his tireless hands, ate deeper and deeper into the hard oak.

His task was nearly finished, when he

heard a carriage draw up at the front gate, and steps ascend the path. They entered the house, and he rested from his work to determine whither they were bent.

Soon after he heard voices. They were voices of women, mingled with those of men, and his heart leaped when he thought he recognized Jessie's clear tones!

He immediately divined peril, and again turned to the window, sawing and hacking now with the fury of despair. A strong surge and wrench at the bar tore it away, and the imperiled Mark was free to leap out.

The voices were now in the front yard, and receding. He could tell they were approaching the carriage.

To climb down was now too slow; and, despite the dangers of a fall, he leaped boldly from the window.

Fortunately he came down in the soft soil near a rosebush; and aside from a lively shaking up, was uninjured.

He had no sooner regained his feet, than he darted around the corner of the building, straight for the carriage.

To his horror it was in motion. The driver was seated in front, the carriage was closed, and the wheels were rattling over the boulders of the street.

He knew all was not right, and called instantly and loudly to Jessie, who was being thus whirled away from him.

Jessie did not hear the loud calls, but the driver did; and, applying the whip, set the horses in rapid motion.

"Stop! Stop! In God's name, stop!" shrieked the half-insane young man, leaping the cobblestone wall at a bound, and flying in pursuit of the receding vehicle.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HOPELESS CHASE.

Two men had been standing at the gateway, and these flew forward in the hope of intercepting Mark Lanyard. One of them was Major Mix; who speedily proved himself to be the poorest of poor runners.

As if conscious of this and stung by it, he whipped out a pistol, whose sharp bark cut the air as the bullet leaped out in its girdle of flame.

But Mix, fortunately, was on this occasion also a poor marksman, and Mark Lanyard sped on unharmed.

It is to be doubted if Mark knew of the flaming pistol and the screaming ball, though the latter came so near that he might have heard its "ping." He was oblivious to everything except the one fact that the woman he loved was being borne from him by those whom he could only regard as enemies. He felt that she was being hurried to some horrible fate; and he was aroused in an unwonted degree by the thought.

In spite of the speed of the galloping horses, so great was Mark's frenzied determination to overtake them that for a time he fairly held his own in the unequal race. But it was not in the nature of things for this to last; and slowly the carriage forged ahead.

The streets were quite deserted at that early hour, and there was consequently no one astir to observe the singular scene.

The driver glanced fearfully back from time to time, and plied the whip with much energy. What he probably most feared was a shot from a revolver; and he might well have dreaded this if Mark had been possessed of such a weapon.

The carriage swept through the principal streets and out into a wide, tree-bordered country road; and after it tore the unhappy young man, fairly crazed for the time being.

And how fared it with Jessie Burnaby?

The banging and jolting of the vehicle, as the horses leaped forward under the driver's goading, prevented her from hearing the pistol-shot; as they had kept her from hearing Mark's calls.

She fancied she was in charge of friends—friends sent to the house by her escaped lover for the express purpose of bearing her to a point of safety, where he would meet her.

She had thought of nothing else all day, and her foolish dreams had been of the meeting with Mark at the country home of their mutual friend, the Duke of Deseret!

She had not sought to visit Mark's prison during the day, for the truth of the supposed facts of the escape had been confirmed by the voluntary statements of Mother Magnus, who was unstinted in her denunciations of the guard who had permitted Mark to get away.

She heard the crunching of the carriage-wheels and the tread of the horses long before the carriage approached the house, and arose softly and made her few simple preparations for flight.

She did not hear the driver enter the house, but she heard footsteps in the corridor, leading to her door, and stood in readiness when the door was opened.

Two men and a woman stood before her; all strangers.

She crushed down her bitter disappointment, for she had hoped against hope that Mark might be himself her liberator.

She answered the few questions asked her; and then followed the party quietly down the stairway and out into the yard. She was hurried at once to the carriage and assisted in; then the carriage door closed with a bang and the team started.

There had been neither light nor sign of life visible about the big adobe, and she took this as an indication of the exceeding care used by her rescuers to avoid arousing the inmates.

A multitude of questions leaped to her lips, but she was not given time or opportunity to frame any of them; and so rode away, exulting in her escape from the horrors of her prison.

Poor, deluded Jessie Burnaby! She was still, in spite of her experiences, only a simple, guileless, country girl, quite unable to cope with the schemers who encompassed her about.

When day dawned, the city was far behind her. The well-trodden road had been changed for a mere trail. The rising sun was on their left, showing that they were journeying south; and, as the carriage mounted a rise, far off to the right she beheld the blue, shining waters of the Great Salt Lake. Mountainous islands emerged from it, between which ran purple channels until they joined the deep blue of the sky.

It was a scene to enchant an artist.

But there were no signs of human occupancy anywhere on the wide, gray plains that stretched about. They had passed beyond the line of the furthest out-lying settlement, and had crossed the Jordan before the coming of day.

To the south and east there arose a succession of mountains. They were bearing toward these.

She longed to question the driver, but he did not heed her when she called to him. Perhaps the jolting of the vehicle prevented his hearing. She fancied that must be the cause of his silence, and gave herself up to a contemplation of the landscape, or such glimpses of it as she could get through the little window. She did not doubt the driver would draw rein after a time; then she would request a seat at his side and question him concerning Mark.

Where was this home of the duke, that they should take this wild route to reach it? She had often heard it mentioned, but had really paid little attention to it, and knew scarcely anything concerning it, further than that it was a vast and rich estate situated far from the City of the Saints.

Finally the driver drew in the panting horses, and when she attracted his attention by her persistent calls and hammering on the carriage doors, he came forward and looked in on her.

"Want out, hey?" was his rude question. "It's a long sight pleasanter ridin' in there, now I kin tell ye!"

"But I want to get out!" she persisted. "And, if you please, I'd like to ride in front with you. Where is the ranch of Major Mix?"

"Jist over there a ways," and he flicked his whip in the direction of a range of hills. "We'll git there bimeby. It's a purty long ride fer one that hain't used to it."

"Yes, it's a long ride," she said, her eyes shining with the thought of meeting Mark. Will we reach it in an hour?"

"Jist about, I calc'late."

"What sort of a place is it?" she persisted.

"The slap-uppest, biggest place in all Utah!" was his rejoinder. "I don't know, though, if you'll like it. It's drefful lone-some."

There was an undertone of kindness in his voice which touched her.

"Oh, I think I'll like it," she averred. "Anything will be better than that dreadful place back in Salt Lake."

She wanted to speak of Mark and unbosom her hopes and fears on that subject, but her maidenly delicacy held her silent.

As they drove on he did not object to her taking a seat by his side, and accommodately pointed out to her many points of interest, descanting on them at length.

The hills were rounded; and, in a lovely valley at their further base, there arose on her astonished vision a structure so bewilderingly beautiful, so large, airy and elegant, that for a space she was distrustful of her own eyes.

It was set against and flanked by a high, bold wall of the mountain, which added to, rather than detracted from, its imposing and lovely proportions.

It resembled a fancy picture of some great building of the old world, with its marble colonnades, its graceful balconies, and its shining, tapering towers.

It was approached through a large area of highly-cultivated ground, made fertile and fruitful by water brought in pipes from the mountain's brow. Here there bloomed many flowers and trees, holding treasures of scent and shade.

"Isn't it glorious!" she exclaimed, as they rattled down the shaded drive toward the great house. "It must seem like heaven just to live here!"

"Yes, it's purty!" the driver remarked quietly. "But I reckon hell might have its doors set with diamonds!"

The remark seemed so ill-timed and shocking that she would have questioned him about it; but he laid the whip across the horses' backs and thus stopped all inquiries.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE DUCAL PALACE.

Two dark-faced men came forward and took the horses by the bits, and another sprung to assist Jessie to alight. They were negroes, she decided, though in all particulars they did not fill her ideas of Ethiopians. But whatever they were, they treated her courteously and even kindly.

She looked about for Mark, hoping to see him spring down the great stone steps to greet her. But Mark was not there; and she grew strangely sick at heart. The words of the driver came back to her with startling force: "I reckon hell might have its doors set with diamonds!"

She was relieved when she saw a woman approaching; a young woman of about her own age, with a sweet, kindly face. Looking into that face, Jessie Burnaby forgot her fears and was again content.

Mark might not have arrived yet; but he would come, and she could afford to be trustful and patient. This would all be forgotten by and by; and she might be able even to look back on her distress and fears with amusement.

The young girl advanced and introduced herself as Mary Walden. It was apparent that she was surprised at beholding Jessie, whom she had never before seen. But this surprise she did not at once put into words.

"Is—is Major Mix here?" Jessie questioned. "I—that is he—"

"Major Mix hasn't been here for several days!" was the puzzling reply. "I think he's at Salt Lake. At least that's where he said he was going."

"And—and is—there a young man here, named Mark Lanyard?"

Miss Walden observed the troubled light in Jessie's eyes, tho' she was, of course, at a loss to account for it.

"No one by that name has been here, so far as I have been informed. But won't you come into the house, please? You look tired! I suppose you have ridden all the way from Salt Lake."

"I am tired," said Jessie, the troubled light increasing. "Thank you, I'll walk into the house with you. Yes; we came straight from Salt Lake City, which place we left some time before daylight."

The girl glanced at the steaming horses which the servants were leading away, and was evidently at a loss to account for the necessity of such rapid travel.

But, Jessie did not heed this look, being too much absorbed in her own thoughts. It was not time for Mark to appear she told herself.

Then she questioned Miss Walden again:

"Was word sent here of my coming?"

"None!"

"Nor of the coming of Mark Lanyard and Major Mix?"

"None whatever!"

"Ah, well! I presume they had not time or opportunity to send word. I'm sure it will all come round right. Yes; I'm very tired!"

She uttered this last, as if Miss Walden had again spoken of her wearied appearance.

Miss Walden was manifestly puzzled, and was, likewise, wild with suppressed curiosity; but she had sufficient tact and discrimination to conceal the fact, and piloted Jessie up the stone steps and into the ample hall.

When she had shown her into a cozy parlor, she took Jessie's heavy outer wraps and hastened away, returning soon after with a basin, water and towel, and a glass of wine to serve as a stimulant.

She had become interested in the guest who had dropped down in so singular a manner, and her sympathies had been aroused.

Miss Walden's little acts of kindly hospitality touched Jessie's sensibilities; and in a very short time the two were on the best of terms, and Jessie was relating her experiences and telling why she had come there.

Miss Walden looked grave.

"Well, whatever happens, you can count on me as a friend!" her lips compressing tremulously, yet firmly.

And with this enigmatical declaration, she hurried from the room, stating that she had duties in another part of the house requiring her attention.

When she came back she found Jessie looking anxiously across the level land to the northern boundary of the hills, in the direction of the city.

"Major Mix has not yet returned," was the volunteered information; "but his son, Marcus Mix is here now. He has been out on a shooting trip in the hills. Perhaps you would like to see him."

"What sort of a man is he?" Jessie asked, for there was something in the tone to create distrust.

"Well, I don't care to talk about my employers, but Marcus Mix is a man I don't think you'll like. I don't like him!"

This was said very firmly and decidedly.

"Isn't he a good man?"

"Oh, I suppose he's good enough. But I don't fancy a man who makes love to every woman he sees. Why, I'm told he makes love to everything, even the Indian women."

"He ought to make a good Mormon!" and Jessie laughed.

But the laugh was hollow, and plainly showed her thoughts were elsewhere.

"You're thinking of that lover of yours?" Miss Walden volunteered.

"I was wondering what the driver meant when, in speaking of this house, he said that even hell might have its doors covered with diamonds!"

Just then one of the black servants glided quietly along the hall.

"I don't know, unless he referred to the serpent king. You saw that negro? We call him the serpent king. He's as near like my conception of the Evil One as any man could be."

A slight shudder thrilled her.

Jessie was puzzled.

"We call him that, because of the way he can handle serpents. He's also a voodoo doctor; and the negroes here all fear him. They believe he can cast spells on them that will make them go mad or die, just as he wills."

"These negroes are not from the South, though there are voodooists. I'm told, in the South. They were brought here direct from the interior of Africa by Major Mix, and they work his mine for him, and till these fields. I shouldn't want to get the enmity of any of them, and especially of Prince George, the serpent-king."

She glanced cautiously about, as she heard a rustle of drapery, and turned deathly pale when she saw the serpent king slipping stealthily away, his every movement showing that he had been eavesdropping.

She slipped after him, and returned shortly, looking white and ghost-like.

"I'm afraid he heard me!" she averred. "You must be on your guard! Oh, I wish I might tell you what I fear! But not now! I may be mistaken! To-morrow I'll open my mind to you. In the mean time be very circumspect; treat these black men with courtesy; and be on your guard against the love-making of Mr. Marcus. He's a bad man!"

Having delivered herself of these startling statements, Miss Walden again hurried away leaving Jessie perplexed and distressed beyond measure.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE TRUE FRIEND.

MAJOR MIX reached his magnificent country residence that night, having driven in quietly after the coming of darkness.

"She is here?" he asked of the lithe, evil-faced black, whom Miss Walden had called Prince George.

The serpent-king spoke English with considerable fluency, but with an accent entirely different from that of the common southern darky.

"Yes suh! She come in this morning; an's in the house now. She not li'ble to leave it till you give the word."

"Good! Keep your eyes peeled, Prince!"

He sprung out of the buggy, and threw the lines to one of the blacks and hurried within, going straight to the room of his hopeful son, Marcus.

The latter was evidently awaiting his appearance.

"You've seen the girl?" Mix queried, looking anxiously at his son.

"I've seen her," Marcus replied; "but I'll tell you, now, father, your scheme won't work."

He resembled the elder Mix in general appearance, but lacked the latter's resolute robustness and capacity for "driving" things. There were evil-speaking men who even declared that he was lacking in intellect, and would not agree that he was a feeble copy of his father, with water in his veins instead of blood.

A black look clouded the face of the duke.

"It'll work, Marcus, if you're not altogether a fool, as I sometimes think you are. You haven't any scruples about marrying the girl?"

"No; but I allow she'll have scruples against marrying me! I had a talk with her to-day."

"Oh, you did?" snorting out the question. "And I presume the very first thing you did was to ask her to marry you, and claim you had fallen desperately in love with her at the first glance?"

"She's the prettiest girl I ever saw!" young Mix confessed. "And, yes, I did tell her that, and I told her the truth!"

"You're a blundering fool, Marcus! What right have you to go raving that way, when there's a matter of money involved? You'll have to regain that lost ground. Some deadly peril will have to be planned, from which you can rescue her at the imminent risk of your life, and thus gain her undying gratitude. Perhaps it can be arranged for you to run away with her, and then a marriage can be brought about some way; by force if necessary."

Marcus did not respond in words, but surveyed the carpet gloomily.

"You're a fool, Marcus!" the elder Mix repeated, rising. "But, there's one consolation! Your fool spells don't last long. The prospect of parting with every dollar you have in the world will bring you round, my word for it; then you'll be willing to follow in the lines I lay down!"

Major Mix had accurately gauged his son's character long before, and knew whereof he was speaking.

A few minutes after he had taken his leave, a slight figure crept stealthily away from the window and went softly in the direction of the room assigned to Jessie Burnaby.

It was not Jessie's figure, however; but was that of Miss Walden!

"It's just as I thought!" was her low comment. "She's been tricked into coming here. But, they'll find she's one true friend in this den of iniquity."

She moved with the greatest caution; and, when she gained the corridor leading to Jessie's room, she paused before entering it. Reassured, she moved on, and tapped softly against the panels.

The door was instantly opened, and Jessie admitted her. No light burned in the room, which was plunged in gloom.

"It's as I feared!" was Miss Walden's low greeting.

Saying this, she grasped Jessie's trembling hand and drew her to a sitting posture on the edge of the bed.

"You have been lied to, and brought here for the purpose of forcing you to marry Major Mix's son."

She knew of Marcus's attempts at love-making that afternoon.

"Do—do you think Mark never sent that letter?" Jessie gasped incredulously.

"Never a line of it! I'm afraid, dear, he's still in that horrid prison in the city. Mix wrote that letter, or got some one to, for he's plenty of money to hire with; and he did it to get you to come cheerfully. He was probably afraid to take you away in any other manner; and no doubt, too, he thought it best to appear to be your friend, instead of your enemy."

Jessie was trembling like a wind-blown leaf, and Mary Walden drew her against her heart as if to afford her comfort and protection.

"Of course they count on me doing my part and keeping silent. I've been so long here that I'm one of the family; and Mix has time and again told me that I'm to come in for a share of the inheritance. I think the major likes me, but he'll count without his host if he thinks I'll lend myself to so great a wrong!"

She spoke vehemently and passionately.

"He can count on the blacks to do whatever he tells them, even to committing murder; of that I'm satisfied. And I suppose he can command the obedience of every one else, and thinks he can command mine. But, he don't know me, long as I've lived under this roof."

"But why should he wish to do this?" Jessie demanded, still loth to believe what she had heard, even though it had been backed by indubitable evidence.

This Miss Walden could not answer.

"When Sam comes, likely he'll know!"

Miss Walden had a lover, also, of whom she had spoken frequently that day—a manly, young fellow, according to her description, who was as handsome as Apollo and brave as a lion, and who could do wonderful things when he set his head to do them. Sam Seebring was his name, and what Sam Seebring didn't know of the crafty world and its crafty ways was not worth knowing, according to Miss Walden's estimate.

"I'm looking for him, now, all the time," she went on. "We can safely trust to Sam to help us."

"Couldn't I find my way back across the desert? if—if it's as as bad as you say?" asked Jessie, now thoroughly frightened.

"Yes; if it wasn't for Prince George! You couldn't get away, if on the best horse in the stable. He knows every path, and all the short cuts, and would be sure to overtake you. There was a young man here once—"

She hesitated and grew in her breath suffocatingly.

"There was a young man here once, who was held for something. I thought at the time it was for a debt which he had refused to pay, but I'm ready now to believe otherwise. He broke away and started across the mountains on a horse taken from the stable. The blacks followed him; and—and—I'm afraid he never saw Salt Lake alive. I haven't any proof of it; but—"

"But what?" Jessie inquired, held by the fascination of a peculiar horror.

"I was told he was killed a month later by the Danites. Every murder in the country is laid at their door! But I think he was slain that night, and in these mountains."

It was a terrifying truth which Jessie Burnaby was thus suddenly called to face. She knew at last she had been duped, that

her simplicity and ingenuousness had been imposed on; and that she had been brought there, far from friends and help, that she might be molded to the will of the Duke of Deseret. That will, as she then saw it, was to force her to a marriage with his son, a desire on his part which she could not at all comprehend; for she regarded herself as only a penniless country girl, with no fortune but her voice.

Mary Walden remained with her till near daybreak, then crept softly to her own apartment.

In the breakfast-room that morning—for she thought it not wise to absent herself—Jessie found herself alone with Marcus Mix, the duke's young hopeful.

"I've been awaiting your coming," he said, advancing eagerly, for he was truly enamored of her; "waiting for an answer to the question I propounded yesterday. It was sudden, but its suddenness ought to be excused, coming as it did from my heart."

His big, watery eyes—they were just like those of the elder Mix, but without the fire and force—beamed tenderly on her, and he extended his arm for the purpose of escorting her to the table.

"Stand back, sir!" she commanded, a fierce wrath sweeping away all timidity. "I'm not in the habit of tamely listening to words of love from such a scoundrel."

Marcus reeled backward as if he had been struck a blow in the face, and a sense of deep humiliation and hate swelled in his heart as he fancied he heard a tittering laugh in the direction of the kitchen—a laugh from the pretty lips of Mary Walden!

"Very well!" and he turned bitterly away. "You've had your say. Wait till I have had mine!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TERRORS OF THE DESERT.

A MAN lay apparently dying on the hot desert sands of Utah—a hollow-eyed, hollow-cheeked man—ay! a young man whose appearance, when in health and strength, had been prepossessing.

He raised himself feebly on one elbow, and his parched lips formed the word, "Water!"

But there was no water there. Only the burning sand and the white, glistening stretches of alkali.

Afar off a lake-like mirage fixed his gaze, and he struggled as if he would draw his famished and wasted form to it.

A pair of coyotes, those scavengers of the plains, started back fearfully as he uplifted himself. They were cowardly alert, ready to bound away at the first sign of danger, but hovering near, ready to plunge into the feast which their instinct told them was coming.

The man turned his glassy eyes on them, and waved them off with his bony hands.

"Begone!" he cried, in words that were mere hollow whispers. "I'm not dead yet. No, nor I don't intend to die!"

He sank down again, exhausted by his exertions, and the coyotes slunk back to their former position and again riveted him with their wistful, hungry gaze.

This man, lying there on the borders of death, was Mark Lanyard, and a retrospective glance will be necessary to retrace the steps that had brought him to that condition.

It will be remembered that he chased the carriage which held Jessie till it was beyond the bounds of the city. He could not keep near it, and the darkness soon swallowed it. But he did not abandon the pursuit.

Finding a horse grazing at the roadside, he mounted it, without saddle or bridle, and continued the chase.

The carriage had gained so, however, that all sounds of its grinding wheels had died out.

He knew he had no right to take the horse in that manner; but necessity is above all law; and he promised to himself that he would make amends by liberally rewarding the owner.

It was a poor preparation for such a journey, but under the circumstances the best he could do. He had no food with him, and scarcely tasted that brought him the evening previous. Neither had he any water, though heading into the waterless desert; and his only weapon was the saw which he had formed out of the case-knife.

He was driven on to this bit of recklessness by the knowledge that his sweetheart was in the vanishing carriage, and that, if he turned back to seek necessities or aid, the chances of re-finding the trail would be precarious.

The carriage was then traversing a well-worn road, but that was no guarantee that the highway would not be soon abandoned. And so he lashed the horse into its best gait and plunged blindly and madly on.

Day dawned and the carriage was not in sight. He had clung to the road, and it had turned aside and was now far beyond reach. Salt Lake City had vanished in the dim distance, for he had ridden through all those hours with the persistence and tirelessness of a Bedouin.

He felt it was useless to turn back for the purpose of picking up the trail of the carriage. It would involve loss of valuable time; time that might be filled with agonizing horror to the woman he loved. Besides, the worn beast that had carried him thus far was not equal to the task. He had ridden it almost to exhaustion. Now, if he would get on, he must husband its strength and treat it more humanely.

The insanity that had held him in thrall had worn away, and he began to see the folly of his recklessness. He was thirsty and feverish, and the pangs of hunger and the depression of fatigue told on him.

He dismounted and permitted the horse to crop the scanty herbage, while he mentally surveyed his position and the chances it afforded. They were slim enough.

He convinced himself, though, by a reference to all he had ever heard of that particular region, that there was but one place of human abode in it—aside from the habitation of Indians and a few hunters and prospectors—and that was the princely establishment of the Duke of Deseret.

His reasoning told him to seek for Jessie Burnaby there; and when he had rested, and the animal showed signs of renewed vigor, he remounted and sought the distant, purpling mountains by the shortest route.

But he did not know in what part to look for this residence of the duke, and went astray. Wandering far back into the desert to discover another and more promising route, the beast threw him and left him to toil on on foot.

It was then that his hardships began in earnest. The desert seemed boundless. The sand and alkali levels, wide-reaching as the sea, stretched away interminably. Nowhere was there to be found any water, or a thing to eat. The horse had been able to nimble the growths of scanty desert grass, which grew here and there, but for Mark Lanyard there was nothing.

Already he was wild with hunger and thirst, and when hour succeeded hour and the night came, followed by another morning, hope almost failed him. But he strove to hold up bravely; and struggled on and on, and ever on, toward the receding mountains, until he fell prone and almost senseless.

Sad as were his straits, the presence of those cunning-eyed coyotes angered him; and he again raised himself; and picking up a pebble, hurled it feebly toward them.

They scampered backward again; and at the same moment, a rifle cracked somewhere on the level, and one of the cowardly creatures dropped over dead.

Mark started and staggered to his feet at that, and fairly hugged himself with delight when he saw a man bound from behind a low clump of sage brush and advance toward him.

A young man was this new-comer, and he carried a smoking rifle; the rifle that had sent death to the coyote.

The other coyote had bounded off like the wind.

"A fellow human starvin' here in this land of the free and the home of the brave!" declared the young man warmly, as he drew near.

There was such a cheery ring in the words that Mark was immediately given new strength by them.

"That beats your time, Sam Seebring, and you've rolled round the world a good deal! Here, take a smell of this! It'll put life into a dead man. I calc'late 'twouldn't take more'n a quart of it to set even that kyote back on his pins."

"Blast the critters! I saw 'em settin' here

on their hunkers, lookin' patient as stones an' wise as owls; and I said to myself: 'Sam Seebring, there's deviltry afoot! Them wolves is a-layin' for a fellow human, in this land of the free!' An' it riled me! Result, dead wolf!"

All this time, he was holding to Mark's lips a flask of water; and Mark was drinking from it with famishing eagerness.

"When you've turned that flask inside out and sucked it dry as a lemon peel, I'll carry you over to that bit of sage brush. 'Tain't no great shakes in the way of a shade, but it's the best this country affords."

Mark was endeavoring to murmur his thanks; but Seebring waved these aside; and, lifting him bodily, bore him into the shadow of the giant sage.

Having done this, he placed food in Mark's hands, and watched him with pleasure as he saw him devour it.

"Better'n a dozen dead men," was his comment. "Dyin' men don't care for chuck, as a rule; and you've got the appetite of a Digger Indian. You're all right; and, now, jist wade into that stuff, while I go and bring up my horse. I left him over the hill there, while I made a sneak on the kyotes."

Mark needed no urging; and when Seebring returned, leading his pony, the eatables placed before the famished man had disappeared.

"I'm glad I don't have to board you as a reg'lar thing!" Seebring commented, grimly. "You'd paralyze the finances of the richest eatin'-house in Deseret. I reckon you're feelin' better, after that gorge; and, if you don't mind, I'd like you to tell me now what in Tophet you're doin' out here in this kingdom of sand?"

Mark was feeling much better; and he gladly complied with Seebring's request.

The rescuer listened with intense earnestness.

"I don't know as I can see all the kinks in the trail," he declared, when Mark had concluded, "but there's one thing plain: That sweetheart of yours has been taken to the Ducal Palace. Just what for, we'll have to find out. I've been makin' that place my headquarters for some time, all owing to the fact that there's a girl over there that's too purty to remain single; and, if you're willin' to go with me, I'll show you the way."

"P'raps I'll lead you into a hornets' nest! I won't guarantee not to. But if you feel like I would under similar circumstances, all the devils out of hell couldn't keep you away!"

There was a ring in this that assured Mark that should he need assistance, he could count on receiving it from Seebring.

"Thank you," said Mark, reaching out his hand, "you may be sure I'll go. I never gave up, even when matters seemed blackest."

"You'll do!" nodding his head commendingly. "And now that you've told of yourself, p'raps you'd like for me to unbosom. I'm a rolling stone. I've been everywhere nearly, and spent several valuable years of my precious existence in looking for gold in Californian sand. I didn't find enough to make it interesting, and so I drifted over the range into Deseret. And here I've been prospecting on the sly, for about five months. I think I know where there's some good ore; but the time hasn't come to say anything about it. But my!" and his eyes shone—"I've never dropped onto anything like that to be seen in the hill under the palace!"

"I doubt if any other man in Utah knows it, outside of the duke and his workmen; but I'd as soon tell it to the world as not; for the knowledge of it would bring in such a rush that mining could be done safely and openly, and be made to pay."

"There are more riches hid in that mountain than I ever dreamed of lookin' on; and the duke's rolling in wealth because of it. He's got a lot of blacks, which he brought from the African interior; and they're working it for him, and keeping their mouths shut up like oysters. I tell you, it's a dandy lay-out!"

His enthusiasm was so infectious that Mark felt the fever of the gold-hunter stirring in his own thin blood.

"I'll help you look into that!" he asserted. "That is, when we've conquered this other difficulty. Oh! if I was strong enough to go on now!"

"You are, I take it!" affirmed Seebring. "I'll lift you to my saddle. We can make it before night, for the place is just across the range yonder."

CHAPTER XVII.

FLOTSAM'S MOVEMENTS.

Too long have the movements of the Wizard Detective been neglected; but other matters seemed to demand first presentation.

Henceforward the reader will be kept in closer touch with the doings of one who has an important part to play in the development of the incidents of this story.

Flotsam found himself in a strange room, when he came out of the swoon. A strange face was near, and strange voices reached his ears.

He was not long in learning that he had been found in the street in a senseless condition by the owner of the house, and been borne to his present comfortable quarters.

He had really fallen into the hands of a Mormon Good Samaritan; a man whose generous impulses were backed by worthy deeds. And many such there are among the Mormons of the Great Salt Lake.

"Hasn't Lanyard come yet?"

Flotsam asked the question of the man seated near the foot of the cot.

"Not yet; but I look for him now at any moment!"

Two days had elapsed, and Flotsam was on the high road to recovery. His head was better, and the fever had left his veins.

He was beginning to chafe, too, under the restraints imposed on him by his illness. He wanted to be up and at work on the task so near his heart. What the essence of that task was, and its inciting motive, will be disclosed by and by.

As the question revealed, he had sent for the elder Lanyard, being desirous of laying before that gentleman the knowledge gathered by his shadow work, together with the conclusions and surmises drawn from it.

And now he was impatiently awaiting that gentleman's coming.

A step was heard on the walk near the door, and Flotsam turned his eyes eagerly in that direction. A little later Lanyard was shown into the room, and the man who had sat near the foot of the cot, arose and went out.

The detective motioned Lanyard to the vacated seat.

"I sent for you because I want to talk to you about your son! Can you tell me where he is?"

Lanyard showed his surprise, but answered promptly enough:

"On his way to England!"

"You think so?" and a smile played about the thin lips.

"I have his own word for it; or rather his letter, sent me just as he was on the point of leaving."

"You're acquainted with Major Mix?"

"Yes."

Lanyard's surprise deepened, and took on a tinge of suspicion, almost of uneasiness. He had had good reason to know Major Mix!

And here it may not be amiss to state, parenthetically, that the note sent by Mark from his prison, by the hand of the servant who furnished him with the case knife, never reached its destination. The servant had delivered it faithfully enough, but Lanyard's private secretary, who was in Mix's employ as a spy on the movements of the elder Lanyard, had failed to place it in Lanyard's hands. So thoroughly was Mix entrenched in power.

Flotsam noted, without surprise, the shade of uneasiness that spread over Lanyard's face.

"No doubt you will be surprised, then, when I tell you that I'm certain your son has not started for England; that he has no intention of doing a thing of that kind; and that the note you say you received was a clever forgery!"

There was no doubt that Lanyard was surprised beyond measure.

"Yet it's all true!" delivering the last with marked earnestness.

"Have you proof of this?" his voice a-tremble.

"Only the word of an honest man. A private detective, in my employ, has been

shadowing the house on the corner of West Temple and Caldwell. In that house, as I have every reason to know, Miss Imboden, the singer, was held as a prisoner. And in that house—" He paused to mark the effect of his words—"your son was also held as a prisoner!"

Lanyard's face had grown ashy and his hands shook.

"That property belongs to Major Mix!" he said, endeavoring to crowd down any show of feeling.

"Exactly! It belongs to Major Mix, the so-called Duke of Deseret. And Major Mix is the man who brought about the imprisonment of these two young people."

"Is my son there, now?"

"He is not!"

Lanyard's face took on a more hopeful look.

"You do not care to antagonize this man?" the detective asked, interpreting the expression.

For a moment Lanyard was silent, as if engaged in an inward struggle.

"I do not!" he confessed, in an humbled voice. "I am ashamed to say it, but I'm afraid of that man!"

"You have reason to be, I take it."

"Abundant reason! I am, in the first place, deeply in his debt. And in the second, he has possessed himself of a secret, which, if made known, would ruin me!"

He twisted uneasily under Flotsam's burning glances.

"Where is Mark?" he timidly queried, his anxiety breaking forth. "You say he was held there as a prisoner, but is so no longer. Can you tell me where he is?"

"He started on a mad race into the desert," was the enigmatical response; then, pressed for an explanation, he revealed to Lanyard all the knowledge that had come to him through the spying of the agent employed to shadow the house.

Lanyard groaned in the anguish of his spirit. All his natural affection was arrayed in behalf of his son, but it was held in check by the fear of the duke.

"I intend to follow Mark into the desert," Flotsam continued, still speaking with great earnestness. "I am greatly interested in the future of that girl—a thing I say to you in confidence. At the same time I am desirous of helping your son. In the last, however, I must ask *you* to help me; and that is why I sent for you to come here."

Lanyard's face was a study of conflicting emotions. He was filled with an intense anxiety for Mark's safety, and yet was almost afraid to make any move in his behalf.

"I would take great risks to aid my son," he declared, at length. "I am at a loss, though, to see how I can assist him through you! If he is out in the desert, he is probably safe enough, so long as he can obtain something to eat."

"You don't get my idea, I see!" and a smile, that manifested a mixture of scorn and disgust, flitted for an instant over the worn face. "Mark, I take it, isn't in the desert. He's at the country home of the Duke of Deseret. The chances are about ten to one, also, that he's there as a prisoner."

Again Lanyard evinced that deep fear of the duke.

"You will have to move cautiously, then!" and he glanced timidly behind him. "The duke is a powerful man, and a dangerous one. I shouldn't want his enmity, if it's to be avoided."

The detective fancied he fathomed Lanyard's thoughts.

"Men have been strangely missing in Salt Lake, eh? and you don't care to be counted with the number? It's a reasonable fear, perhaps!"

Again Lanyard glanced around; then hitched his chair nearer the bed.

"You have guessed aright, my good friend. One does not know who to trust. But for the fact that I have heard Mark speak favorably of you, I would not be at all sure *you* were not trying to trap me into saying something that might injure me! The Sword of Damocles hangs suspended by its single hair over the heads of a great many men here in Utah! I don't desire to be of the number."

"Besides, I fear the duke. He is all-

powerful. How powerful you have probably failed to realize. I beg of you, therefore, to be cautious in all you undertake, both for our own sakes and for the sake of those whom we love!"

The last held an implied question concerning the relations existing between the fire-king and the stage singer; but Flotsam did not choose to notice it.

"I think you can help me; and, in helping me, can aid your son. I'm going to the palace. But not in my own character as the stage wizard. I want to go in disguise. You have influence with prominent men here? Many of them high up in the duke's favor. You must use that influence."

"How?" came the anxious question.

"Get from one of them a letter to the duke, introducing to his favorable notice Lord Castlemaine, of Castlemaine Manor, England. Bring that letter here as soon as you can, and I'll see to the rest."

"It will be a difficult, and even perilous, thing to do!" Lanyard returned, thoughtfully.

"But you can do it!"

"I—I am not sure!"

"You have at least one friend, Mr. Lanyard, high in power here, to whom you can go with a matter of this sort. I feel sure of that. No man is so friendless but that he has one friend whom he can depend on to help him when he is in a desperate strait!"

Lanyard drummed uneasily with his fingers.

"It will be perilous, but I'll endeavor to get the letter. Yes; *I will get the letter*, come of it what may!"

"Spoken like a brave man!" cried Flotsam, his eyes shining with inward delight. "Get that letter, and I'll attend to the rest. As to the dangers: mine will be greater than yours; for I intend to beard the lion in his den!"

"You shall have the letter to-night!" rising, firm in this new determination.

"To-night it is, then! The sooner the better! I'll be ready for you; and within an hour from the time you put it in my hands, I'll be on my way!"

Lanyard pressed the hand of the daring man; then walked softly and thoughtfully from the room, bent on implicit and speedy obedience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLOTSAM'S METAMORPHOSIS.

A PALE-FACED gentleman, of benevolent aspect and snowy side-whiskers, drew rein in front of the stone hitching-post at the duke's country residence; and waving aside the black who had hustled forward to assist him, climbed stiffly out of the stirrups.

"Is the duke in?" he asked the negro, bending on the latter a beaming smile.

"Yes, suh! Duke's t'ome to-day!"

"Very well, then; take this animal to the stable, and rub him down before you feed him and put him away!"

There was something so commanding in the stranger's appearance that the servant bowed and promised compliance.

"Can't I help you, suh?" he questioned, anxious to be of still further service.

"Help me? Gracious, no'! Unless you care to run forward and tell your master a stranger wishes to see him! I'm a deal sprier than I look. I can outride you any hour of the day or week, young man! I presume you never heard of Lord Castlemaine, the great rider to hounds, and the patron of the chase?"

The black gave him a look of open-mouthed astonishment, and then hastened at a quick trot toward the palace, leaving Lord Castlemaine to come on more slowly, as the latter desired.

Flotsam's metamorphosis was complete, and his most intimate friend would have found it difficult to detect in that elderly English hunting lord a trace of the stage wizard and fire-king.

He had the prim walk of one whose limbs are rheumatic, and yet who desires to conceal the fact and simulate the strength and agility of middle-age. His face was naturally pale, for he had undergone much recent suffering. The mark of the bullet had been covered by the peculiar combing of the whitening hair, and there was nothing to

show that the head had been the target of a murderous shot.

He carried over his right arm a large saddle case, or bag, which he had refused to give into the hand of the servant. It held articles he did not wish every one to see.

The intimation that a genuine lord was to be Major Mix's guest was not long in being noised over the great house, for the amazed black had not spared his tongue.

The duke hustled forward with becoming dignity, and bade the great man enter. His own choice of title showed him to be one anxious to worship at the feet of nobility. He had never heard of Lord Castlemaine; but that did not matter, for he was woefully ignorant of many things with which he professed to be thoroughly acquainted.

Not for a moment did Mix suspect the cheat that was being practiced on him. Prepared as he was for almost everything, he was not prepared for this, and so he greeted the pretended lord with great affability, and bade him welcome.

"I have some things in that bag that I think a great deal of," said the bogus Lord Castlemaine, as a black picked up the saddle-case for the purpose of bearing it away. "My dueling pistols, and some changes of clothing! I would not have anything happen to them."

Thereupon Mix gave orders that they were to be handled gingerly and placed without delay in the room assigned to the guest.

"Ah! thanks!" and Lord Castlemaine smoothed his benevolent side-whiskers and bestowed on his host a condescending smile. "You have very clever servants, major! May I ask what they are? Not ordinary negroes, I take it!"

The major was proud of his men, and answered promptly enough.

"They are Soudanese blacks, picked up by me while on an expedition into the African interior. I find them more reliable and more faithful than the common negroes of this country. They can always be depended on."

He was speaking truly in this. The black servants of the palace were models in their way, and just the men for the place.

Major Mix then entered into a recital of the particular circumstances under which he had found and engaged them; a portion of it being fact and a portion fiction. He was anxious to stand well in the estimation of this English lord; and he knew of no better way than to make a parade of his travels and adventures, with occasional incidental mention of his present financial condition.

Food and drink were set before the guest; and Flotsam praised everything, and satisfied his hunger in a manner to convince the most skeptical that his praises were genuine.

He was constantly on the alert for indications that might tell of the presence of the young people there; but, though the two sat talking till a very late hour, his eyes were not greeted by the sight of either Jessie or Mark.

He proved himself an early riser; and, on the ensuing morning, was up with the sun, and strolling leisurely about the extensive grounds.

He was maturing his plans and endeavoring to shape them to meet every emergency, and had almost forgotten the alleged object of his early walk, which was to view the sunrise from the little knoll back of the house, when, in turning a corner, he found himself unexpectedly face to face with Mark Lanyard.

He could ill conceal his surprise and retain his pretended character. Mark was pale and hollow-eyed, and showed every evidence of having seen hard times.

Mark had reached the place only the day before under the guidance of his new-found friend; and though received with apparent warmth by the duke, it was manifest to him that his position there would be one of constant peril.

He had already observed, before meeting the new guest, that his every movement was watched by the blacks, and his footsteps determinedly dogged.

But there was one compensation for it all: He had been able to see Jessie Burnaby; to assure himself she was well and in fair spirits; and had been able to whisper into her ears his love and his hopes.

He moved aside now and would have per-

mitted Lord Castlemaine to pass on his way, but the latter arrested him.

"You are an early bird, I see, like myself. Your name is—ah?"

"Mark Lanyard; and I presume you are Lord Castlemaine."

"The same, my good fellow! You wouldn't mind walking with me to the top of yonder knoll. A fine view of the landscape ought to be had from that point."

Mark was about to refuse with as much graciousness as he could, when something in the tone of the last words attracted him.

"I'll go with you!" he declared, giving the bogus lord a quick glance.

Whereupon, speaking indifferently of indifferent things, they moved side by side up the slope.

"I reckon, now, young feller, you don't know a reel live lord when you see him!" was the astonishing statement that fell on Mark's ears, when the crest of the slope had been passed and they were no longer in sight of the house.

"Not Flotsam, the fire-king!" he gasped, his eyes filled with a perplexed light.

Had there been any one there to see his expression, the well-kept secret of the Wizard Detective would have been revealed on the instant.

"The same old Uncle Fuller! But you want to get a better grip on the muscles of your flexible countenance, young man, or the cat will be shore to jump out of the bag; and then there would be a yow-yowing sure enough!"

"What are you doing here, rigged out that— You've come to assist Jessie—and me!"

"That's the size of it; but keep a grip on them muscles. Straighten your handsome features; take the bulge out of your eyes; and walk along here as if you were dead interested in that patch of grass land over there. There's just about a dozen blacks a-follerin' ye, as I discovered a minute ago, and they're not half as big fools as they look."

Mark did as he was bid, and together they strolled down the slope, while the Wizard Detective unfolded his plans and purposes, and at the same time pointed out with a cane the general beauties of the scene.

Then Mark detailed the adventures that had befallen him, both in the city and in the desert.

"We've got a desperate man to deal with!" was the grim comment. "I'm bound to help this girl, for the reason that she belongs to my professh; and in helping her, of course I'll help you. But you want to be careful; and when you tell her of what I've told you, be dead certain there ain't some one listening to your story that hadn't ought to hear it."

He had dropped the gentlemanly and precise style of speaking, and used language more in accord with that Mark was accustomed to hear from his lips.

Having said this, and impressed watchfulness in every particular on the young man, he turned again toward the palace, whose high white towers were plainly visible above the rise.

As they strolled back, talking of the plants and flowers and of the hunting to be had in the region, they observed one black slip stealthily away through the rose bushes near the garden wall, and two others slouch forward as if going toward the stables.

"They've had their snaky eyes on us!" Flotsam affirmed. "But I fancy they haven't seen or heard anything to reward them for their trouble!"

Then he detached himself from the companionship of the young man and turned toward the white steps where the duke had become discernible.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNPLEASANT INFORMATION.

"AN unpleasantly pokey place in here, if it is jammed full of gold and silver!" Sam Seebring growled, as he pitched forward over a big rock which the gloom had kept him from seeing.

He was in the mine, under the hill against which the palace was set. It was not the first time he had been there, for he had discovered a means of entering several weeks before, and had been studying the secrets of

the mine at every favorable opportunity since.

He checked his growling comment, and with difficulty saved himself from a fall. Voices had come to him, and that indicated a necessity for caution. It might not be the safest thing in the world to be caught prowling around in there.

Having located the voices, he moved on once more, feeling every step of the way, and determined not to betray himself.

The voices grew more distinct; and then he knew them to be the voices of the elder and younger Mix. What was more, they were discussing a subject of great interest to him, as he believed; and were discussing it cautiously, as shown by their subdued tones.

"Here's a lark!"

With this, he got down on his hands and knees and crawled still closer.

"Not only the fortune, but my life is at stake!" he heard the elder Mix say, in a tone that showed much uneasiness. "You were a fool for letting that fellow come on the place, and I admit I was equally a fool when I took in Seebring."

"Gittin' downright interestin', this is!" and Seebring flattened himself out on the rocks, and metaphorically pricked up his ears for more.

"There's only one way out of the difficulty. Flotsam must be put out of the way; and you must marry the girl. It might be better to send her after him!"

There was murder in the very tone, and Seebring, schooled as were his nerves, could not repress a shudder.

"I dislike, though, to seek the life of a woman!"

There was silence for a space, and Seebring fancied he could hear the scrape of a knife.

A ray of light came through a crevice; and, resolved to know more, he again wormed forward.

Applying an eye to the crevice, he had a good view of the interior of a small room that had there been hewn out of the solid rock. It was comfortably furnished and showed evidence of long occupation, and he could not doubt the two men resorted to it frequently.

Seebring had passed that way several times, but this was the first he knew of the existence of the room.

"There's more things in this hole under the ground than was ever dreamed of in my jogerfy!" was his quaint comment.

Major Mix was whittling nervously at a bit of board, and the son was sitting near, awaiting what further he had to say.

"If you'd only make the thing a little clearer to me!" the young man grumbled.

"You're asking me to do these things, and speaking of danger, and yet you never fully explain!"

Major Mix closed his knife with a snap, tossed away the stick, and glanced askance at his son.

"I've always hesitated to speak about it. But you're a man, Marcus, and no doubt your demand for fuller information is right. I did wrong in the long ago—bitter and irreparable wrong. But through that wrong came the financial start we have. I killed a woman! Not with a quick knife-thrust, but with slow poison. To more thoroughly secure myself against detection, I carried away two girls that had been left to her care. One of these girls, now grown up, is the young woman who came here in the carriage. Where the other is I don't know; but we'll hope she's dead."

He was scrutinizing his son's face keenly, anxious for indications tending to show how the story was being received.

But Marcus kept his thoughts well concealed.

"A man that I thought dead and dust years and years ago has appeared on the scene. I was warned from London of his coming. He is in Salt Lake City now, though I didn't recognize him at first, for he came in disguise. You've heard me speak of him. He is Flotsam, the fire-king!"

Marcus lifted himself a little, and appeared more interested.

"I don't think he has spotted me, or dreams that the wealthy Duke of Deseret is the man he's looking for; but he will know it soon, if steps are not taken to prevent."

He's bound to know it now, I suppose, sooner or later, for he has seen the girl, and must know who she is.

"I tried to drive her back to the obscurity of the ranch, or seclude her until he had departed, but I couldn't do it. He had already seen her. Then, to keep him from communicating with her, I held her there in the town, and now have brought her here."

"But I became afraid that he suspected something, and so I tried to kill him that night on the stage, when I fired at him from the wings. I didn't do it, for I've learned that he's still alive."

"Should he find the girl, he will at once proceed to expose me and place me under arrest, for he's a thoroughly fearless man. But, so long as I hold the girl, I've the key to the situation. He will be afraid of striking at me, knowing that I'll surely be revenged on her."

"This state of tension can't last, though. And it has now come to the point that it's his life or mine!"

This was said with singular emphasis, and in so cold-blooded a tone that the concealed listener shuddered.

"A very devil you are, Major Mix, an' no mistake!" and an unwonted fire burned in eyes of Sam Seebring.

"I shall put the serpent-king on his trail. Then, I want you to marry the girl, so that if anything ever happens, the relationship will help us, and enable us to hold onto the money."

"As for Seebring, the sneaking scoundrel! Prince George told me he had seen him poking about the mine, as if he suspected something. If he finds we're working so rich a lode down here, he'll blow it all over the country."

"You know what that means. The Mormons would try to stop us from working it, for they don't want the outer world to get the idea that there's gold and silver in here!"

After this very long explanation, Major Mix rested, eying his son uneasily, and thus showing his anxiety for Marcus's approval.

"And Lanyard?" Marcus questioned.

"Well, I knew he'd put in his oar on behalf of the girl. So I tried to get him sent out of the country. Failing in that, I thought to hold him in seclusion without letting him dream that I was doing it, until this bit of danger had blown over. He broke out, and now he's here! Curses on that Sam Seebring! Why couldn't he let the young fool die in the desert and become food for coyotes? But, as he's here, I presume we'll have to hold him for a time!"

"If that fire-king, as he calls himself, would only drop the search and go away! But he won't do it. He'll keep it up till—till he crosses the trail of Prince George! Then, we'll be quit of him!"

There was a satisfied smacking of the lips, as the murderous speech ended.

"Well, I'll marry the girl, if she'll let me; or if you can arrange it! By all the gods! she's a beauty! But I fancy it will not be an easy thing to do!"

He showed his teeth in an evil grin, as he recalled the manner in which Jessie had repulsed his advances.

Major Mix crossed his legs, and smiled satisfactorily.

"I'll fix that, all in good time! If you'll just stand by me in everything else?"

"I'll stand by you; and I'll marry the girl! Blast her, I want to get even with her!"

The major breathed easier. Prince George had become inordinately attached to Marcus, and a word from the son could make the serpent-king disregard even the father's commands.

"Then, I'll speak to Prince Gorge in the morning!"

He began to chew meditatively on a bit of pine, and arose as if to leave the place; and Seebring, seeing that a further stay there would bring peril, slipped softly backward into the depths of a tunnel.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME UNEXPECTED OCCURRENCES.

SAM SEEBRING's mind was in a whirl of excitement, as he crawled through the concealed opening by which he had entered, and out into the gloom of the night. He had learned many things to fill him with

astonishment, and now understood matters which had hitherto been dark in spite of the attempted explanations of Mark Lanyard.

"I 'low I can give my gentle friend, Mark, p'ints that'll make his optics stick out like a pair o' knots on a log."

He did not know if the plotters were still in the cave or had returned to the house. The hour was relatively not late.

Seeing a lamp burning in a room near the kitchen, he moved toward it; and was soon greeted with the sight of Mark Lanyard and the two girls. They were not anticipating immediate danger; a fact evidenced by their lively conversation and repeated laughter.

He was about to push open the door, or rap to attract their attention, when the voice of Jessie Burnaby, lifted in song, held him in check.

A step near him caused him to look around; and he beheld Lord Castlemaine.

Castlemaine lifted a finger for silence, as the song swelled out on the night. It was but a simple song, but it held a depth and wealth of feeling.

Seebring did not see the tears that stood in the eyes of the old man, though he detected the huskiness of tone when Castlemaine again spoke.

"Glad to see ye!" Sam whispered, when the song had ended. "My desire to talk to you an' Mark for a minute has been hotter'n a house afire."

"So?" and the tone showed immediate comprehension.

He did not move from his place, but kept an alert watch as Sam tapped at the door and summoned Mark to the desired conference.

"Where can we go?" he asked, when he had heard Seebring's whispered words.

"Right out here somewhere; anywhere!"

Mark nodded a "good-night" to the girls and followed him away from the building, filled with curiosity. The bogus lord had already passed beyond the rays of light falling through the window.

"We are watched!" Castlemaine whispered, when they gained his side. "I believe, though, we can throw the rascals off the scent."

Not one of the three comprehended more fully than he the character of the deadly peril to which they were hourly and momentarily exposed. The serpent-king was a murderer by nature and education, and only needed a word of command to attempt the life of any one.

To Seebring had already been revealed the true character of the bogus lord; and he willingly gave Castlemaine the direction of the task of evading the spying blacks.

A few turns were made, then the garden was left behind, and Flotsam led the way to a clump of bushes, well screened from observation, and which could not be approached by a spy without the latter being seen.

Ensconced in this, he turned to Seebring for an explanation; which was speedily forthcoming.

"Then my disguise is still unsuspected!" and the fire-king breathed easier. "I feared you were going to say they had discovered my identity. We must get away from here at the first opportunity. Can you arrange for horses?"

This last to Seebring.

"A dozen, if needed! The pasture down there is full of them. And there are saddles in the stable. Drop me a hint when you want to slide, and the hossflesh will be ready."

For more than an hour they crouched there, going over every detail of the proposed flight. Then they crept back as silently and stealthily as they had come.

They were to make a break for liberty an hour before daylight, a time when sleep would probably lie heaviest on the ever-watchful blacks.

Flotsam took extra precautions that night, and locked his room securely on retiring. He did not mean to sleep. But he dropped into a short doze, from which he aroused with a start.

Unwittingly throwing out his hand, it fell on something cold.

There was a movement, as he drew back his hand, and something soft dropped with a dull thud to the carpet. He started up in alarm; and to his startled ears there came

the peculiar deadly "whi-r-r-r" of a rattle-snake.

Another sounded its terrible rattle in the bed, as he lifted himself up in fright; and from all about the room there came answering rattles. The room had been transformed into a den of these venomous reptiles.

Flotsam was ordinarily a brave man, but this was too much for his nerves. He drew his feet together, while the cold sweat broke from every pore, and endeavored to pierce that deadly gloom. The knowledge that his disguise had been penetrated was of a peculiarly discomposing character. If it had not been penetrated, those snakes would not be there; placed there, as they undoubtedly were, by the black snake-charmer, Prince George.

What puzzled him most was the manner in which they had been inserted into the room.

He reached over and extracted a match from one of his pockets, and lighted it by scratching it against the wall. Its rays showed a dozen of the venomous things sounding their warnings in various places. One lay in front of the door.

In spite of this, and the fear that the one in the bed would strike its fangs into his legs, he leaped out and touched the match to the candle.

Then he cautiously pushed the rattler out of the bed; and standing in the bed's center, hastily shuffled into his clothing.

At the same moment there came a scream from one of the apartments occupied by the women.

"Out of here I go, snakes or no snakes!" he exclaimed under his breath, climbing down and approaching the rattling serpent that lay in front of the door.

He reached forward, thrust the key into the lock, and hurled the door open, just as the snake ceased its menace and launched itself at him.

He avoided its leap by quickly stepping aside; and then, dashing into the hall, hurried with quick feet toward the room from which had issued the cry.

"This way!" he heard a voice shout; and, recognizing it as Seebring's, turned in that direction.

Seebring had not slept at all that night. Something seemed to whisper in his ears the word: "watchfulness!" and in obedience to it he had not even entered his room, but had lain on the ground outside the building, screened from observation by the thick leafage of a low tree.

He was thinking it time for him to get the horses in readiness for the contemplated flight, when the scream drew his attention.

Up to that moment he had seen and heard nothing to cause him uneasiness.

Now he saw a man leap from a window, bearing in his arms a burden, and this figure was followed by another.

All doubts as to what it meant were dissipated instantly, for the scream again came, this time from the burden borne by the man who had appeared first.

Seebring recognized in all this an attempt to remove Jessie to some other point, and perhaps to do her serious harm. It was not a time for questions and explanations; and so he rushed forward, and with a blow of his iron fist sent the ruffian reeling to the earth.

He whipped out a revolver; but the second ruffian took to his heels and disappeared when he caught the ominous glitter of the steel barrel.

The one who had carried the girl had been knocked senseless; and Seebring, picking up the equally senseless girl, gave that call for help.

Almost instantly, as it seemed, Flotsam was at his side.

"To the cave with her!" he whispered, passing his burden to the detective. "I'll look out for Mark, and the other girl."

He knew Mark would want to accompany Jessie; and, as for himself, he was resolved not to leave the place unless Mary Walden accompanied him.

Lights were flashing in various parts of the house, and he saw the excited blacks running hither and thither, and knew that his danger was momentarily growing.

He drew back into the cover of the bushes and thumbed his weapon uneasily.

Soon he saw Mark appear; and hastening to him, repeated the instructions given to Flotsam.

"But you?" Mark asked, loth to leave him, even though so anxious to follow to the point where Jessie had been taken.

"Cut sticks and git out o' hyer!" was the low but firm response. "It will be worse than a hornets' nest around hyer in about two shakes. I'm goin' to wait for Mary; an' if she don't come, I'm goin' inside of that crib and run off with her!"

Thus commanded and reassured, Mark disappeared, just as a number of blacks crawled around the corner of the big house.

Seebring saw them, burrowed further into the bushes, and came out against the window of Miss Walden's sleeping apartment.

"Are you awake?" he whispered, tapping on the panes.

All was as dark within as Erebus.

"Oh, Sam! is that you?" came the hysterical inquiry.

"Yes, shove up this sash an' let me help you out! Are you all ready fer travelin'? The devil's broke his chains, and we've got to slide!"

He could dimly see the outline of her figure, as she advanced, and with trembling hands lifted the sash.

Then he caught her about the waist, and by an effort of main strength lifted her to his side.

"W is it?" she whispered, clinging to him i ror. "What did that scream mean? am! what has happened? That naby, was it not?"

"it was," said Sam, drawing her house and back into the Now we'll slide!"

CHAPTER XXI.

IN SILVER CORRIDORS.

THE ant to which the Wizard Detective hurried with Jessie Burnaby, and where he was afterward joined by Mark, Seebring, and Mary Walden, was the mine itself; the mine whose secrets had been so carefully guarded by Mix and his son.

What that mine held in the way of wealth not even Mary Walden knew, though she knew there was a mine and that it was being worked by the blacks.

It was in truth one of the richest mines in the Territory; a fit companion to the great Emma Mine, since so famous.

But Seebring, by his surreptitious explorations, knew something concerning its riches, though he knew little enough of the extent of the underground excavations and of the amount of work which had been done.

He was familiar with mines, however, and fancied he would have little difficulty in piloting the party anywhere through this. He sought it as a refuge in the present instance, knowing they would be instantly pursued and sought for everywhere outside, and that escape by flight would be especially hazardous to undertake just then.

The opening through which he squeezed with Mary Walden was a small aperture in the rocks, which he had discovered some time before by merest accident, and which he had since safely utilized. Through this opening the others had already passed.

Once inside, he halted and gave breathless attention to what was transpiring without. He could hear the subdued murmur of voices, and knew that the garden was being thoroughly searched by the blacks.

"If they find us in hyer we'll make a fight of it!" was his thought. "There's plenty of places to fight behind; and there'll be some dead niggers before the snow is over!"

Then he took the trembling hand of his sweetheart, and crept with her back into the darkness of the interior.

They soon came on the waiting figures of the three who had preceded them, and a whispered consultation followed.

As it would have been extremely perilous to proceed further into the mine without a light to guide their steps, Seebring sought and found a miner's lantern, which he lighted.

As they advanced, fearful all the while that the light would reveal their presence there, they came on constant evidence of the exceeding richness of the ore vein.

Seebring was an expert in such matters, and his blood bounded feverishly as his

eyes took in the richness and beauty of the scene.

Ordinarily, silver and gold ore is dull-looking stuff. It is only when it is extremely rich that the inexperienced eye can detect anything uncommon in its appearance. But here the "wire" silver hung in clusters, looking not unlike grayish moss; and the unmistakable glint of "free" gold was everywhere manifest.

"I've seen ore before," Seebring whispered breathless with admiration, "but I never seen anything that could hold a candle to this!"

No sounds of pursuit had reached them, and they stopped again, after a time, and held a further conversation, forming themselves into a committee of ways and means.

The stories each had to tell were sufficient to show that in some unexplained manner the Mixes had been made aware of everything. Perhaps some of the blacks had been able to overhear the talk of a few hours before, though at the time it had seemed to the three men so impossible for any one to approach them unobserved.

But what might not be expected of men who were stealthy enough and brave enough to insert those rattlesnakes into the room occupied by the detective?

Deeming themselves still safe, they sought a point that might be defended, in case they should be discovered. Here Mark was left with the women; while Seebring wandered away with the light in search of some other way out, and Flotsam went back to guard the opening by which the party had entered.

When they had disappeared, Mary Walden covered her face with her hands and gave vent to a series of heart-broken sobs. She was crushed to the earth by the discoveries and revelations of that night.

She had deemed Major Mix and his son bad men, but never dreamed to what depths of wickedness they might descend. She could not doubt the word of her lover, Sam Seebring. That even made the truth thus forced on her more shocking and terrible.

Jessie comforted her as much as she was able, and Mark spoke many words of cheer.

With these terrified women, more than with his own dangers, were the thoughts of the Wizard Detective, as he slowly made his way forward. Yet he did not forget his customary caution. His keen eyes, undimmed by his apparent years, were ever on the alert, and his movements were as lithe as those of the youngest man of the party.

He crouched to a sitting posture, when near the opening, for a suspicious noise had reached him.

It was well that he did so, for had he taken another step he would have stumbled full against the serpent-king, who had entered the opening and was lying in wait there for him.

By the subtle instinct which seemed to govern all his movements, Prince George had become aware of the direction and destination of the flight; and had followed stealthily, anxious to strike a blow in his own stealthy way.

He was himself a human serpent, which may account in some measure for the strange power he wielded over every species of venomous reptile.

The snaky eyes of the black shone so under the influence of suppressed excitement, as he heard one of the party coming back along the little tunnel, that he held his head aside, fearing the glitter of the orbs would betray him.

Not until Flotsam halted, did Prince George again face toward him.

Then he leaped to his feet, and at a single bound was at the side of the man he meant to slay, his right hand at the same time grasping firmly the haft of a slender knife.

But he had to deal with a man who was as fearless as himself, and one abundantly able to meet every unexpected emergency.

The Wizard Detective sprung to his feet, as he heard the movement, and with a side-wise blow of his brawny arm struck back the hand that Prince George had uplifted to strike.

Then, in that intense darkness, they closed, and for a moment reeled like swaying pines, locked in a deadly embrace. Then Prince George began to comprehend what manner of man he was dealing with. He

had counted on his own liteness and agility to give him the mastery, but found these were not to be of much benefit; for the arms of the detective closed about him in a hug that rendered him helpless.

Like a veritable snake he writhed and twisted, turning first this way and then that in an effort to break the hold. He succeeded at length, and leaped backward intending to advance again and strike.

But a tongue of fire leaped at him from the detective's pistol; and terrified by that, he slipped still further back, though uninjured; and when he returned to the charge, he found the game had fled.

The sound of the shot struck terror to the women; and, though, they looked to Mark for reassurance, he had no word of favorable explanation. It held for him only a foreboding of deadlier peril.

A short time after, Flotsam stood by them, and whispered, breathlessly:

"Take the women further back, Mark! We've been discovered, and likely will have to fight. If Sam was here now!"

Seebring reappeared at that moment, having been hurried by the sound of firing.

Only a few words were needed to put him in possession of the facts.

"It's all right. Let 'em come! Behind these rocks we'll be more'n a match for every nigger the duke's got."

"There's a nice little hidin' place for the girls back there, too!"

He did not wait for instructions, but taking the scared girls in hand, ran with them along the corridor. He felt sure of the way, having passed over it twice, even though he was no longer guided by the light of the lantern, which had been extinguished.

He returned in a remarkably short time.

"Now, let 'em come!" was his grim defiance. "I'm achin' to git a crack at that Prince George, anyhow!"

"Did you find a way out?" Mark asked, uneasily.

"Yes; there's a hole back there! It opens into a gorge, and is the point where the refuse of the mine is dumped. I've hunted for that dump pile many a time, but never could find it before, for it's practically in the heart of the mountain."

"Why not make a break that way, then?"

"For the very good reason that though there's an outlet, it's blocked, and no doubt watched. About a ton of powder would be needed to lift that stone door. I figured that out, before I came back. Ketch me not goin' through, if I could safely!"

"Then, we'll have to fight?"

"That's the way I've sized it!"

They had no light; and trained their expectant ears on the tunnel by which they had entered.

There was much noise in the grounds, though it reached them faintly.

After they had hearkened to it for a long time, Flotsam said, in his earnest way:

"Boys, do you know I don't like the looks of things? There's somethin' back of that caterwaulin'. It ain't in the nature of them blacks to howl that way!"

When speaking to these friends, he sometimes used the western vernacular, and sometimes pretty correct English, both of which seemed to come natural.

"What do you suspect?" Mark queried.

"You're a Utah man! Tell me, ain't that way the Indians do when they want to cover up some piece of hellishness goin' on elsewhere?"

The young man gave a simultaneous start.

"You think mebbe the girls is in trouble?" Seebring interpreted.

"I don't think! I don't know!"

It was enough, and Seebring instantly ran back to the point where he had left them, in fancied security.

Then they heard him cry, agonizingly and despairingly;

"They're gone; and the place has been turned into a den of snakes!"

Then, as they rushed to confirm this dreadful news, all about them, in the corri dors they had thought secure, they heard the ominous warnings of a multitude of rattlers.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DARK.

In spite of the fear inspired by this start, the discovery, a search for the missing girls

was instantly instituted. It seemed possible that they might have become frightened, and moved further back; though the theory did not impress itself strongly, because of the presence of the snakes.

This told as certainly as words could have done that the serpent-king had entered the mine, under cover of the noise made by his comrades outside; and there seemed little question that he was responsible for the disappearance of the girls.

Mark was wild with fear and grief, but Seebring was even calmer than usual. It was to this young man's credit, that danger did not cause him to lose his head.

"We'll take a look!" he agreed. "But I'm certain sure they're not in hyar; and I'd be willin' to bet big money they're again in the house. But wherever they are, we'll find 'em. I don't go back on that last proposition."

Flotsam had already begun the search, regardless of the warning rattles of the disturbed reptiles. Once he stopped long enough to crush the head of one that had thrust itself menacingly across his path. The party had resorted again to the lantern, and this he carried.

But in spite of the closest scrutiny nothing was to be seen, found or heard; and the suspense was becoming great, when a low, excited call came from Seebring.

"Hyer's the way they went out!" he explained, as the two hastened to him.

He was pointing to a ragged hole. Flotsam revealed its character more fully by thrusting the lantern down in front of it.

"I thought I saw a track back there, and I crep' along hyer, feelin' with my hands for more, when I dropped onto that!"

The cavity was not large. It was near the point where the girls had been left. About it were foot-prints of men. These were fresh.

"There's where the old snake-fancier came in. I reckon he brought his pets with him and dumped them into the tunnel out there for our benefit."

"You are right," said the detective. "He came in there. You can see that that is the print of his shoes. He wears a kind of sandal, you remember, turned up at the toes. There were two others with him, one being Black Jim, the keeper of the horses. Black Jim wears a patch across the ball of one of his shoes. You can see it there. The other I don't know, but you can see there was another, for his track is not like the others."

"Ah!"

He stooped closer and held the light nearer the damp soil.

"There's the print of one of Jessie's shoes. And there, near it, is a bit of thread. That was thrown there by Miss Walden. You see, it has been torn from her dress; and no doubt purposely, to aid us in the search."

"Which shows one thing more—they were not rendered unconscious before being carried away. Nor were they bound. But their heads were muffled to keep them from crying out. They were surprised and rendered powerless, else they would have cried out."

The Wizard Detective, by these keen readings, showed what a master he was of the art of observation, an art that is a lost art to the great majority of the human family.

As nothing was to be gained by a further stay in the mine, they began to consider what they had better do.

It was finally decided that Flotsam should approach, and, if possible, venture into the palace in search of information, and the others should continue the hunt in the vicinity of the opening.

It seemed the best course, at least until the coming of day; for the darkness was favorable to the fugitives.

Flotsam slipped away as soon as this was settled, and the two young men began to beat about in the near vicinity, but without any great hope of stumbling on a discovery.

They were about to proceed in wider circles, when certain sounds caused them to retreat. There could be no doubt that the blacks were lying in wait, and the wonder was that they had permitted the Wizard Detective to pass without attacking him. Perhaps they had a reason for so doing.

Mark and Seebring crouched near the opening, their weapons in their hands, and strove vainly to penetrate the impenetrable gloom.

The rustling sounds came nearer, showing the enemy to be advancing; and they slipped through the opening into the interior, feeling they would be safer and have better fighting ground there.

It was the error of their lives. They had no sooner crawled through and turned about to face these crawling, unseen enemies, than a block of stone loosed itself by some invisible means and dropped like a door into the aperture, completely closing them in.

Mark grasped Seebring's hand in an appealing crush.

"Old boy! we're in for it!" Seebring responded. "That's what I call an infernal mean trick. Shooed us in here as if we was partridges, and then pulled the triggers from under the box lid."

There was an attempted mirth in the whispered words, but little of the genuine article. The situation was too serious for that.

They knew how impossible it would be to lift that down-dropped door, of whose existence they had never dreamed; and, fearful lest they should be hemmed in in the tunnel and thus rendered an easy prey, they shuffled backward at their best gait; breathing freer when they had gained the interior of the mine, in spite of the occasional angry rattle.

They feared to relight the lantern; they almost feared to move because of the serpents; and, in their uncertainty, they knew not what to do.

Finally they made a slow advance toward the door in the rear, opening on the mine dump, which Seebring had already examined and declared to be immovable. This did not offer much hope, but they could not stand still.

"Blast the snakes!" Seebring growled, treading on one, which struck its fangs harmlessly into the thick leather of his boots. "I'd ruther tackle grizzly bears and Injuns!"

He was shaking a little, in spite of his iron nerves, as he tore the snake loose, kicked it into the gloom, and again stepped forward cautiously feeling his way. "A man that'll fight other humans with rattlesnakes is a human devil!"

They approached the heavy door which there walled them in from the outer world, and were thinking of examining it, for the purpose of discovering if possible the secret springs that controlled its movements; when the door flew open, as if of its own accord, and a dozen blacks swarmed boldly through to the attack.

They were led by Prince George, as daring a fiend as ever lived.

This fact was not discoverable, however, to the surprised youths.

Nevertheless, Seebring lifted his revolver and fired, with the intention of bringing down this leader. It failed of its mark, but struck one the blacks pressing close behind him, who fell back with a terrible howl.

This disconcerted the attacking party and gave Mark and Seebring a moment in which to beat a retreat.

They fell back, with weapons held in readiness; and, as the negroes were once more recklessly advancing, a bloody combat appeared imminent.

Prince George uttered a wild cry for the purpose of frightening the young men, and this was taken up by his followers, as they charged in a compact body, heedless of the pistols in the hands of their foes.

There could have been but one result to the unequal contest. But at that instant the unlighted tunnels and drifts flamed into ghostly illumination.

This light, red as blood, and emitting rolling folds of crimson smoke, blazed forth from a side drift; and through it stalked a fear-inspiring specter.

It was a ghastly, fleshless skeleton, waving a fiery sword in threatening attitude.

The dull glow of the red light fell full upon this startling figure, adding to its terrible aspect, and sickly it over with what seemed wavering blood-stains.

The sight was to much for the composure of the superstitious blacks. Even the redoubtable Prince George recoiled before it.

Then a chorus of frightened yells and cries arose; and the negroes tumbled pell-mell over each other in their anxiety to reach the outside. Within ten seconds not one of them remained.

"That's what I call purty good!" came

from the skeleton, in the voice of the Wizard Detective. "I calc'lated that'd fetch em."

He reached up one fleshless hand and removed from its place the gleaming, papier mache skull that had so well served its purpose; then cast aside the black garment that had infolded him, and on which the bony, skeleton frame-work had been drawn with an artist's hand in glistening white.

It was to be seen then that he had discarded the attire and disguises used by him in the character of Lord Castlemaine, and returned to the clothing worn by him while in the city.

The red fire, caused by the burning of a compound familiar to all stage people, was dying out, plunging the interior of the mine into apparently greater gloom.

It had blazed but for a few moments.

"Then it's you?" Seebring questioned, drawing a deep breath of relief, for his own nerves had not remained unshaken.

"It's me," he replied, quietly, coming up to them. "I've been to the house, where I got these articles and clothing and the various things I used in my performances. The girls ain't there. I searched the house over; which was not difficult, as Mix supposed me here and had left the premises unguarded."

"They've been carried away; but where to? is the question!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE OF FIRE.

THERE was no concealing the depression under which every member of the little party labored. They had hoped almost against hope that Mary Walden and Jessie Burnaby would be found at the house, and that they would be able to rescue them and bear them in safety to the city. This feeble hope was now almost dashed.

Hemmed in by deadly enemies, with the darkness filled with unknown dangers, their situation was desperate; and now to this was added the uncertainty concerning the fate of the young women.

However, they could not remain inactive, and so they set about searching for the best plan by which to guide their future movements.

The trail left at the point through which the young women had been hurried, suggested that there might be a similar trail on the outside.

Bent on finding this, they advanced to the door through which the blacks had fled, and soon were out of the serpent-infested mine.

The serpents had given them no trouble, though, for some time; and it was evident they had crawled away into various crannies and holes, where they were likely to remain until disturbed.

Flotsam had come in by the tunnel which first gave his party entrance, and observing from the sounds that a fight was in progress had promptly come to the aid of his friends as the flame-enveloped skeleton, swinging the sword of Death.

Now that they were outside, they scarcely knew which way to turn. The sky was overcast, and a cold wind blew down from the hills. But guided by Seebring, who knew more of the vicinity than either of the others, they crept along the hillside until they were near the point where it was believed Prince George and his men had emerged from the mine with their prisoners.

Flotsam found the exact spot after a careful examination, made by crawling along the ground and feeling with his hands.

He announced his discovery; and the three crept slowly in the direction taken by the footsteps, as shown by the imprints in the soil.

When a hundred yards from the opening into the mine, all trace of the tracks was lost.

Flotsam felt that he could find them by keeping on the same direction; which he did, soon coming on the ruts made by wagon-wheels.

This revealed to his mind the fact that the girls had been bundled into a wagon, and been borne away in it, possibly back to the city. But when they sought to follow this trail to further settle this question, the wagon-ruts were found to disappear on the stony hillside.

A number of unsuccessful attempts were

made to relocate them; then Flotsam urged the young men to remain where they were, ready to leap to his assistance, while he continued the search. Before departing, however, he left with them a quantity of material to be used according to his instructions, should they be surprised and attacked.

The material was almost identical in its effects, and presumably in its composition, with the celebrated Greek Fire of the Middle Ages. Yet, judging by what is now known of Greek Fire, the process of its manufacture was different; for the compound given by the Wizard Detective into the hands of his young friends, consisted of small explosive tubes, with fuses attached, making them appear somewhat like Chinese fire-crackers.

"Don't use them 'less'n you have to!" was his final injunction, as he hurried away, after instructing them how they were to be lighted and hurled. "We may need 'em a good deal worse some other time; and there ain't a great quantity of 'em."

Without following the movements of Flotsam, and digressing for a few moments from a consideration of the acts and thoughts of the young men, we will look in on Major Mix; at that instant tramping uneasily up and down the hall of the great house.

He had but recently entered it, and word had been brought him of the discomfiture and flight of the blacks under the lead of Prince George; those courageous blacks, on whom he had banked so highly in this emergency.

He had ordered the serpent-king into the field again, and would listen to none of their tales of fright at skeletons, at whose existence he derisively pooh-poohed.

Major Mix realized that the crisis in his affairs had come. He must succeed now, or be forever ruined. He was unscrupulous, and with a heart that did not shrink from murder, should it answer his purpose.

A listening black had revealed the cheat imposed on him by the pretended Lord Castlemaine; and the death of that individual had been decreed. Prince George had failed to bring it about; had woefully failed. In fact, in his efforts against these enemies, Prince George had been successful in but one thing:

He had secured the girls; and they were now being borne to a place where, Mix believed, they could not readily be traced and found.

Strangely enough, he shrank from attempting the lives of these young women; and seemed only desirous of holding them in some secure retreat until he could extricate himself from his present danger.

He was elaborating his plans, now, as he paced restlessly up and down the wide hall.

He meant to leave the country at the first opportunity, and in some other land seek the safety he could no longer have here. He would dispose of the mine to some leader of the church, who could quietly work it, and who would doubtless be glad to get hold of such a property at a reasonable figure. As for the original and rightful owner, he never gave a thought.

He would have to get rid of the ducal estate at a ruinous figure, he did not doubt, but he meant to get rid of it.

His musings were interrupted by the soft step of one of the blacks, who, at that moment, poked a woolly head through the doorway.

"The prince, suh! He have found 'um. On the high hill nigh the mine."

It was a sufficient summons; and Major Mix hurried out after the excited negro. A wild joy thrilled him. If these men could be destroyed, the path to safety seemed wide and secure. He was resolved they should not again escape. By his personal presence and example he would hold the blacks to the deadly work.

The reader needs not to be told that the men found were Mark Lanyard and Sam Seebring, who were crouching in fancied security in a natural rock fortification on the hillside, anxiously awaiting the detective's return.

Their first notification was a rustling in the grass not far distant; an unnatural rustling, with which the wind had nothing to do, and which aroused their mistrust.

Seebring flattened himself against the

ground and swept with keen gaze the dark horizon.

"They're closing in on us!" he whispered. "They're right out there; and, I judge, ready for a rush. Give 'em the fire, when they come!"

These words were uttered in a low tone, but sufficiently loud to be heard by Mark, who reclined at his side.

Seebring reached into a pocket, drew out one of the tubes, and lighted the fuse; hiding the light against the ground beneath his big hat.

As the fuse sputtered, he flung his hand upward; and almost instantly the heavens were a glare of red.

Straight for the huddling and scared blacks shot the strange missile, exploding almost in their faces, with a roar like that of a cannon. Fire flew over and upon them in a blinding blaze; and, burned and startled, they crouched in their places, held firm only by the stern words and menaces of the serpent-king.

The voice of Prince George rose high above all, urging his followers to a charge, as another of those screaming dragons of flame and mystery hurtled through the night.

It was followed by another and another; then by a half-dozen, lighted and hurled at once. The effect was terrible. A rain of fire seemed to descend on them from the clouds, blinding, scalding and burning.

Nevertheless, they scrambled to their feet as Prince George's roar again broke out, and came clambering and slipping up the slope. It was an exhibition of courage and devotion to a leader that has had few equals.

The two young men on the hillside had been surrounded; a thing they were not long in discovering; and thus retreat was rendered difficult, if not impossible.

Realizing the desperateness of their situation, they piled the tubes in heaps, and, lighting a dozen fuses at once, showered the inflammable and deadly rockets on their foes.

The blacks, notwithstanding the heroic attitude of their leader, could not endure the storm of flame. To advance into it was like walking into the gates of Inferno. They broke; and, racing away sought shelter and cover wherever they could.

"Now let's make tracks!" Sam urged. "Our fireworks are played; and if them chaps come back, we're goners. I say, cut sticks while we've a chance!"

Acting on this, they fled as rapidly as possible along the stony slope, not halting until they had placed several hundred yards between themselves and their determined foes, of whose powers they had had a sufficient taste.

Stopping here to discuss the situation, they were surprised to hear their names called in low tones from a dark clump of bushes near. They answered guardedly, and Flotsam advanced to their side.

"I seen the blazin' o' yer muskets!" was his grim comment. "I low, too, I never seen so much fire in the sky all at one time since I was born. You scattered 'em!"

"Yes!" Seebring made answer, but it was in humility, not boastfulness. They had had too narrow an escape. "We used all you gave us. Those scamps don't scare as easy as you'd think."

"There'll be enough scalds and burns to run a hospital!" and the old man chuckled. "An' they fit, did they?"

"Well, we're ready to leave 'em behind. I found the trail of the wagon!"

The others started joyfully. This was good news, indeed. They had escaped the clutches of Prince George, and now, with the trail discovered, they could hope to accomplish something.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

"HIST! What's that?"

So spoke Mary Walden, peering into the gloom, from whence came a low whirring.

She answered the question by giving a short backward step toward the granite wall of the mine, at the same time clasping Jessie's wrist and drawing her after.

"That was a rattler! Did you not hear it? One of Prince George's, I do not doubt. He has them everywhere, and they're always

getting loose and crawling into unexpected places. They keep me half frightened to death!"

She started again, and pressed still closer to the wall, as the warning rattle came again, this time louder and more menacing than before.

She was thinking of calling to their friends, in waiting a few yards away, when she heard them approaching, as she thought.

"Look out for the rattler!" she whispered. "It's just there in front of you!"

Instead of receiving the expected reply, a dark object shot softly through the air, and she found herself struggling in the suffocating folds of some kind of netting that had been dexterously tossed over her head.

Jessie Burnaby had been served in the same way.

Before either could struggle to freedom they were clasped in firm embraces and lifted to brawny shoulders. Broad palms, suffocating and odorous, were used to still any contemplated cries, and they were borne rapidly, yet quietly, from the place.

The abductors of the young women were certain clever and soft-footed blacks who acknowledged Prince George as their master, and in this instance they were acting under his direct instructions.

Hastening with their struggling burdens through the low and narrow opening, they reached the outside, and started at a rapid gait up the sloping hill.

So fiercely, however, did the captives fight for liberty, that the negroes were forced to stop from time to time and more securely draw the enveloping nets.

The women were frightened almost into hysterics; of that there could be no doubt; but the abductors only grinned in wide-mouthed pleasure at their vain writhings and thrashings.

"Twists like an eel!" one observed to the other, in their own language. "Makes me think of fishing in the big forest!"

"You'll wish you were back there fishing," the other growled, "if you let the boss hear your tongue. He'll slit it for you!"

At this reminder, his companion relapsed into grim silence.

A wagon was waiting for them on the further slope of the long hill; and into this the terrified women were bundled without ceremony. Then the wagon rolled away into the darkness.

They knew their captors had climbed in beside them, for the sense of hearing told them that; and a thought of what their fate might be, was something to chill the very blood and drive it stagnated back upon the heart.

When the vicinity of the Ducal Palace had been left a considerable distance behind, the driver applied the whip and the horses jogged on at a livelier pace.

Then a halt was commanded, and the suffocating netting removed from the heads of the young women.

They glanced helplessly and almost hopelessly about. The men having them in charge they knew were blacks.

"Who are you, that dare treat us this way?" Mary Walden asked, assuming a courage she by no means felt. "I know you to be some of Prince George's men! Do you know what will be done to you if you do not instantly return us to the house?"

"Didn't git you out o' the house!" one of them returned insolently.

She recognized him by his voice.

"Oh, Dan! Dan! To think you would treat me this way! You I've cooked for, and helped in so many ways! Don't you remember how I brought you nice things to eat that time you were down with the fever?"

Dan did not immediately reply. He was probably ashamed of the part he was compelled to take in this abduction, but dared not say so.

"Won't you send us back? Back to the palace? or, better, drive us to the city?"

"Didn't find you in de palace, missy?" one of them chuckled. "Foun' you two a-hidin' in de cave of the mine. You want to go back to that place?"

"Will you not take us back?" she pleaded, the choking tears in her voice. "Back to the cave; yes! Anywhere! Anywhere! Only stop and turn back with us!"

A mocking, high-keyed laugh greeted this, in which even the one she had addressed as Dan joined.

She grew faint and sick at heart. They were in the power of these wretches. Men without heart or sense of obligation. What could they expect but that their pleas for mercy would be received with jeers?

Jessie Burnaby, held quiet by the dreadful fears that smote her, leaned closer against her friend. In some way, strength seemed to come from the contact.

The driver, as if anxious to bring the unprofitable talk to an end, flourished his whip and sent the horse forward.

For a time a general silence reigned, broken only by the hoof-beats and the rattle of the wheels. The cold night wind, blowing from some distant snow-cap, chilled and depressed.

Great as was their own distress, the thoughts of Mary and Jessie went back longingly and wonderingly to those left behind in the gloom of the mine. What were the dangers, disappointments and miseries encompassing these friends? What would they think, and how would they feel, when they came to a knowledge of the truth?

Naturally, each feared the worst for that one nearest and dearest; though their fears and hopes were not all selfish!

Then they gave themselves to reflections on the direction and distance traveled, and to anxious surmises as to their probable destination. The action of the blacks began to show that they were to be borne to some far-off spot; possibly to be held there indefinitely as prisoners.

The information that had recently come to them through the spying of Sam Seebring had laid bare the springs of motive actuating the Duke of Deseret.

Therefore, they knew they were not likely to be taken to Salt Lake City; and, surmise as they might, they were unable to fix on any other point.

Mary again addressed Dan, appealing to him to inform her of the place to which they were going. But he only replied evasively.

"Know soon enough, w'en yo' get there!" he declared doggedly, when she pressed him again. "That's all I got to say: Know soon enough w'en yo' get there!"

It was a poor return for the many kindnesses Mary had bestowed on him, but he would say no more.

They were far out on the wide sweep of desert plains when day dawned rosily in the east. Familiar mountain peaks came into view, and they saw they were approaching the shores of the Great Salt Lake.

Soon after sunrise they reached its saline margin, and looked across its undulating, crystal-blue expanse. A few white-winged gulls dipped and soared; and these gave to this strange dead sea its only sign of life.

Mary knew now pretty well where they were. The lake was not many miles wide at that point, and the low-lying opposite shore was distinctly visible.

One of the men leaped out of the wagon, and after some search along a reedy flat, came back dragging behind him a boat, which moved lightly and gracefully through the shallow water.

Into this boat the women were placed. Then the driver turned his team toward the plains; and the two blacks who had seated themselves in the boat, took up the broad-bladed oars and pulled straight out into the lake.

Had the circumstances been different, this boat ride, on that beautiful, pellucid expanse, might have been a thing of perfect joy. As it was, it was but a stage of fear-inspiring and terrible journey, whose end was made horrible by a mysterious dread.

After a hard pull of an hour, the boat's prow was turned toward a small island, where flourished a growth of tall reeds, sufficient for concealment. Upon this island a temporary halt was made, while the blacks cooked breakfast.

The women did not feel in a humor for the coarsely-cooked and none-too-clean food, and declined that offered them.

Then they were again on the lake, the men laboring at the oars as before.

In vain did Mary Walden and Jessie Burnaby sweep the receding land for

glimpses of the rescuers they so hoped to see. Nothing of human or animal life was visible. The team and wagon had vanished among the hills long before, and no other moving object had appeared.

When the opposite shore of the lake was gained, the boat was hidden; and then the captives were marched on in front of the blacks, across a rolling alkali waste.

This continued for an hour or more, when columns of smoke came into view, and, on rounding a low hill, there was to be seen a squalid Indian village.

Old men and women sat blinking, sleepy-eyed, in the bright sun in front of tepees; dogs and children rolled and wallowed in the sands; and big, slouching bucks—too lazy to work, and almost too lazy to hunt—stalked about or sat carelessly astride their little ponies.

But no sooner did the approaching party come into view than the scene changed as if by magic. The women and children fled to the cover of the tepees, the dogs began to bark excitedly, and the braves put themselves quickly in a position for the defense.

Black Dan stopped, as he beheld this commotion, and raised his hands in sign of peace.

At that, two of the warriors stepped boldly forth, and advanced to within speaking distance. Then, discovering that the faces of the men of the strange party were black, their fear seemed to vanish.

Dan was pleased, and immediately walked forward to meet them.

He held a short talk with the Indians, pointing occasionally to the women. Then he came back with the information that they were to enter the village, where he had arranged for their kindly reception.

"Will you explain what this means?" Mary Walden demanded, with some of her old imperiousness.

"Orders o' the duke, missy!" and Dan grinned deferentially. "He said to bring yo'two here, an' to leave yo' here till he said diff'ent. That's all I know!"

"Do you mean that we are to be held prisoners here in this miserable village? That we're to be left to the tender mercies of these merciless Utes?"

Again Dan grinned.

"Orders o' the duke, missy; not my orders! Dan he too old a fox not to know he own business!"

The faces of the girls took on looks of consternation. Jessie knew little enough of the Utes: of any Indians, in fact; but Mary Walden deemed them a treacherous lot, and that was enough. Besides the appearance of the village, with its dirt, its squalor, its poverty, was enough to sicken the heart of any one not bred and reared under such conditions.

"Will you not take us away from here, Dan?" Mary begged, her tones piteous in the extreme. "If you will take us to Salt Lake, I'll see that you're paid more for your trouble than you could get from the duke in ten years. You know I always make good my word!"

"Trouble with the duke, too. He make he word good! Too good! If Dan do what you say, he not live ten days."

"But he couldn't reach you!" she urged. "You would be where there is law. You would be among friends, who would protect you!"

The black shook his head.

"Could never get away from power o' Prince George!" he averred. "You not know the serpent-king, long's you see him. He strike long way. Thousan'miles, mebbe. He blow him breath; you die. You git cramps; he put spell on you; he throw snake through the dark; you die! No, no, missy! No could get away from Prince George!"

He was glancing fearfully around, even as he spoke, evidently afraid that even this exhibition might bring on him the displeasure of the great voodooist, whom he believed to have such magical powers.

Mary Walden groaned in despair.

"Better move on!" Dan commanded, observing that the Indians were eying him intently. "Not allus safe to talk too much. Better move on!"

There was nothing to do but to obey. These blacks were armed; and they were rendered desperate in the discharge of their duties through their dread of the serpent-king. In addition, the Indians doubtless

stood ready to aid them, should it become necessary.

"You will explain, will you not, why we were brought here? We are not to be killed?"

"Held here, one mont', two mont', three mont'—a year, mebbe! I don't know. Better move on, now!"

And thus they were driven into the village, and to a lodge hastily made ready for them; and their hearts sickened, and their fears increased, as they saw the squaws leering out at them from the tepees with a displeased curiosity.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WIZARD DETECTIVE'S WONDERFUL MAGIC.

On the night following that of the advent of the young women into the Ute village, there was a great commotion manifested among these inhabitants of the tepees. There was much running to and fro, and a general excitement plainly apparent, extending even to the women and children.

There had been a tremendous amount of drum-beating throughout the day, and numerous gatherings of the warriors and medicine-men in the one big lodge that seemed to be devoted to council and sacred purposes.

Painted braves, gaudy in feathers and bright colors, had hung about this lodge, and there had been harangues innumerable and a great smoking of pipes and much consumption of vile tobacco.

Neither of the young women was skilled in reading these things, though Mary Walden was better qualified to judge of what was happening than was her companion.

The two had not been ill-treated since their coming to the place, though the blacks had departed and they were seemingly at the mercy of the Utes.

Naturally, they thought the perturbation into which the village seemed plunged had somewhat to do with themselves, and Mary expressed a half belief that the Utes had discovered signs of pursuit and were preparing to resist all attempts to rescue the prisoners, in which case a fight would ensue and their would-be rescuers might be slain.

It was not a reflection to bring quiet nerves and a disposition toward repose.

But Mary Walden, shrewd as were her general judgments, was at fault here. No signs of pursuit had been discovered, and the Utes were not fearful on that point.

They were, nevertheless, working themselves into a state preparatory to war, and war against the whites.

A Mormon town had been planted some months before on the edge of the alkali plain near the great salt sea, and not many miles from the homes of the Utes. It was regarded by the latter as an infringement on their ancient and inalienable rights, and on more than one occasion they had thought to resist the encroachment with bloody hands and blazing torches.

Matters had recently been brought to a crisis by the stealing of a horse from the Mormon settlement by one of the young braves, who had been reared to look on all whites as his especial enemies, and horse-stealing as a particularly laudable and honorable business.

The stolen horse had been tracked to the Ute tepees, and, when it was demanded of these Indians, they had defied the whites, and were now preparing for war.

The presence of the girls in their midst had nothing to do, therefore, with these strange preparations and the war-cries emanating from the council-house.

The coming of the girls had been only an incident, though not an especially pleasing one. The Utes did not want them there, though they did not mean to harm them. They had undertaken to hold them, because they were asked to do so by the great Duke of Deseret, who, in times past, had more than once proved himself a friend.

On this night in question the drums thumped louder than ever, and the yells that arose from the council-house were shriller and wilder than before. The braves, too, seemed more excited, and the tumult was beginning to take on a deafening, not to say terrifying, tone.

The young women driven almost to distraction by these apparent omens of ill, crouched in abject fear in the darkest corner of the tepee that had been allotted them, and strove to shut out from their ears these dreadful sounds.

Within the council-house, two old and wrinkled medicine-men were chanting in sing-song fashion, in time with the beat of the drums.

Suddenly a hush fell on all the assembled braves, and even the medicine-men ceased their droning through the influence of the universal silence.

Then a shout went up, that held a combined note of fear and joy.

The medicine-men, drawn by an irresistible curiosity, and forgetful for the moment of their sacred office, rushed to the door of the big tepee and peered out in the direction toward which the others were staring.

The sight which they saw filled them with a mingling of terror, surprise and distrust.

A shining figure had advanced from the plain and was now stalking in solemn Indian fashion among the tepees straight for the door of the medicine-lodge. He was an Indian in garb and general appearance; likewise a Ute. The strange thing about him was the peculiar heat glow that seemed to emanate from him; a glow so bright that the Indians fancied it cast a glare on the lodges as he stalked past them.

A big blanket was folded about his body, held in place by his hands, one of which held also a huge medicine-bag, in shape like a stuffed weasel-skin. This he shook once in awhile, causing it to give forth a peculiar rattling sound.

There had been a prophecy uttered a few years before, by a medicine-man now dead, that when the white men (meaning the Mormons) pitched their tepees by the waters of the great salt sea, a medicine-man would appear in fire from above, for the purpose of guiding the Utes in the expulsion and overthrow of the hated race.

Not an Indian there but recalled that almost forgotten prophecy, as he looked on the gleaming figure stalking so silently toward them. Hence, the note of triumph and joy in the yell that went up.

The Utes fell back respectfully before the stranger, and made way for him as he turned to the lodge entrance. Even the medicine-men, distrustful as they naturally were, did not try to bar his progress, but gave way with the others.

With a low grunt of approval the new medicine-man, for such he was taken to be, walked to the center of the lodge; and his eyes there falling on the lighted pipe that had been so recently in use, he picked it up and sent a solemn whiff of smoke upward.

The Utes crowded close after him, though still maintaining a respectful distance. They knew not what to expect; and, amid their awe, were as curious as children.

They inspected his clothing, with eager eyes, and bent inquisitive and fear-inspired looks on the shining phosphorescent glow that appeared to come from his person. Intuitively their lips formed words that were quite as much indicative of adoration as of anything else.

In all things, except this fiery glow, the strange being seemed to be an Indian; and he was as gaudily feathered and painted as the highest chief there.

A low fire burned in the middle of the lodge, where the medicine-men had been brewing their decoctions. This he scattered with his feet; not without receiving grunts of disapproval from the medicine-men, whose work and magic seemed thus to be scorned.

When the last ember had been removed, and the smoke had ceased to ascend, the singular being muttered a few words of incantation. Then he spread a blanket over the spot. More incantations followed and, when the blanket was removed, lo! a young tree had started through the hard, burned soil.

The sight was greeted with wondering cries.

Again and again the blanket was put down over the growing tree, and removed; and at each time the tree was seen to be taller and larger. At the end of a very few minutes, a strong young cottonwood unfolded its leaves gloriously in the pit that had held the fire.

The wizard plucked it up by the roots, seized a hatchet and chopped it into lengths, and laid these for a new fire.

Then the blanket was once more called into use; and when it was taken away a fire was crackling and burning in the wood.

The savages were stilled and mystified. Nothing their medicine-men had ever done could in anyway compare with that.

The vessel used, was placed on this fire, and into it was poured a quantity of water from a big black bottle. The water caught from the flames as it fell, and blazed up in a manner most frightful. The wizard tossed some of this burning material over his clothing and scooping it out of the pot rubbed it through his feathered hair. Hair and feathers broke into a blaze; but, when the flames died out, they were seen to be unharmed.

The medicine-men of the tribe had been watching him jealously. They were not fools; and their own tricky performances told them to expect deceit in another. They had never seen such an exhibition of magic; but they were not willing, for that reason, to bow down and worship this man as a god.

Their grunts of disapproval now arose loudly, showing they were not convinced, even though the warriors were.

The strange Indian, discovering these signs of discontent, motioned to them; and wonderingly they drew near the bubbling, flaming pot.

He thrust the hatchet into the fire beneath it, and indulged in a weird chant in an unknown tongue, while it was heating.

The medicine-men watched him anxiously, fearful of being entrapped into some act of indiscretion.

Taking up the big black bottle, he applied it to his lips, evidently swallowing a portion of its contents. Then he drew the now red-hot hatchet from the fire; and, lifting it so all could see, deliberately applied the glowing edge to his naked tongue. Smoke issued amid a hissing sound, but the tongue remained uncrisped.

Thereupon he motioned the medicine-men to imitate his example, offering the bottle first to them to drink. They drew back, with exclamations of fear. They were not ready for so desperate an ordeal.

Observing this, he turned toward the braves, assembled, who were almost atremble with fear and awe; and dipping up a quantity of the flaming liquor from the pot, tossed it off at a draught, smacking his lips as if enjoying it.

Then, while the fire continued to leap upward, and the uncanny broth bubbled and sung, he extended his hand dramatically:

"Listen, my brothers! I speak to you in the words of the white man, for it is of the white man that I come to talk. You would war on the village by the big salt sea. Let my brothers consider it well. You have heard of the medicine-man who is to come and lead you. I am he!"

He was having the closest attention, though the circle of crowding braves had widened, for a fear of him was on all. Even the doubting medicine-men were stilled.

"When my brothers are ready, I will lead them! But not to-night. To-morrow night I will make more medicine, and the tree will again grow, and I will ask the gods concerning you.

"But there is first one thing you must do. You hold in your lodges two girls of the pale-faces. They will bring ruin on you. Your warriors will fall in battle; the swords of the white men will eat you up and their bullets will devour you. Let these maidens go; and then I will lead you to victory!"

He was closely observing the effects of his words, and saw many looks of disfavor.

"Against the white men have I come to lead you; but I cannot do it, if these girls remain in your midst. Their friends await them by the sea. Let them depart in peace, for you do not war against them. They eat of your meat and drink of your drink. They have not harmed you! Have I not said enough? I am the shining one, who is to lead you to victory!"

"Thou false one!" cried the medicine-man highest in favor, speaking in the Ute tongue. "Thou art but a dog of a white man thine own self, come here to beguile us to our undoing!"

With this exclamation, he leaped forward;

and, but for a quick turn of the other, would have snatched away the nodding head-dress.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TIME OF PERIL.

In endeavoring to carry out the role of the medicine-man of Ute prophecy, Flotsam had entered on a dangerous undertaking; and one which seemed at that moment about to fail.

Seebring had been the one to suggest its feasibility, for Seebring was familiar with the prophecy and the expectations concerning it.

Together they had followed the trail of the wagon on the borders of the lake, where a close examination revealed the point from which the boat had been dragged. A little reasoning convinced them that the captives had been conveyed across the lake; and there was but one point where it seemed at all likely they would be taken, and that was the village of the Utes, whose location was well known to Seebring; he having stumbled on it more than once in his gold-hunting rambles.

Mark was sent at once to Salt Lake City, to hurry help from that point; and the others continued on as fast as they could toward the home of the Utes, crossing the narrow end of the lake in a leaky boat, which they found after much search.

At the moment of the seeming greatest peril to Flotsam, when the medicine-man sprung forward with that denunciatory cry, Seebring was lying in the concealment of a lone bunch of sage on the alkali level not a hundred yards away.

Hearing that cry, and guessing that it meant danger to his friend, he wormed quickly along the ground, keeping well in the shadows, and approached the lodge from the rear. Not till he was so near that he could have touched the lower end of the lodge-poles, did he stop; and then he lay, with his head against the ground and every faculty strained to the utmost, awaiting developments.

If worst came to worst, he was determined to rush to Flotsam's assistance, even though his own life paid the forfeit.

Even in that moment of expectancy, he did not forget the young women (one of whom was his sweetheart,) who were known to be held somewhere in that collection of tepees. He would have given much to whisper them a word of encouragement, and assure them that brave friends were near, working for their release and ready to die for them if need be.

The Wizard Detective, thus boldly charged with fraud, realized that only prompt action and the utmost fearlessness could save him.

With a sweep of his strong left arm he hurled the medicine-man backward in a heap; while with his right hand he tossed a small quantity of red fire preparation into the blaze beneath the pot.

Instantly that bloody red glare shot upward, filling the tepee with its suggestive haze, and bringing into bold relief the stern, terror-marked faces of the warriors. A fold of the crimson smoke hovered in ghostly clouds about the wizard's head, giving it a fear-compelling aspect.

"It is enough!" he demanded, with fierce energy. "Or shall I cause the bloody fire to spring forth and devour you?"

He motioned toward the blaze, where the red glare was slowly dying out, and again it flamed forth.

With startled cries the braves tumbled backward, almost crushing each other to the earth in their efforts to get away from the deadly thing.

He gave a scornful glance to the crouching medicine-man, and beckoned to the warriors to return. They beheld the movement; but not one ventured to re-enter the lodge until the red fire had burnt out and the rolling red smoke had vanished. Then they did not seem eager to approach too near to this miracle-worker, and insisted on keeping at a safe distance from the fire and the bubbling pot.

Flotsam did not notice that the other medicine-man had disappeared. In truth, he had almost forgotten that personage, in

his watch of one who had made the attempted assault.

No man, however, ever had craftier foes to deal with. Being adepts in the art of deceit—for by it they thrived and gained all their influence—they were not ready to accredit this stranger with the supernatural powers which he claimed; believing him to be a trickster like unto themselves.

When the assaulting medicine-man receded backward, his companion dropped down as if also fear-stricken, and slipped out under the lodge skin, which he uplifted to gain exit.

He lay there, prone on the earth, for a time, debating what to do. Even though he was not ready to credit the stranger, he was quite willing to concede that he might be a very dangerous man, and that it behooved him to be guarded in whatever he undertook against him.

He saw the light of the red fire, and heard Flotsam's words to the braves. Then, feeling that it was time to act, if he would disabuse the warriors of their fancies and fears, he crawled slowly around the lodge.

He meant to gain entrance just in the rear, near the point where Flotsam stood; and hoped by an unexpected attack to disconcert Flotsam and overwhelm him; knowing that, as soon as he sprung on the pretender, his brother in the art of deceit would rush to his assistance.

Sam Seebring's curiosity had so grown that he had ventured to raise a flap of the tent and peer within to ascertain just what was occurring, and to judge the more accurately of the peril of his friend and confederate.

He was lying thus, with his head thrust under the edge of the flap, when the medicine man crept around the angle nearest him.

Instantly a yell of alarm sprung to the throat of the Ute, and with reckless courage he hurled himself on the prostrate intruder. He recognized that Seebring was a white man, but the cut of the latter's clothing, which he could see fairly well in spite of the semi-gloom.

Quick as a flash Seebring turned to meet this unexpected rush, but he was not quick enough to avoid its worst effects. He managed to half uplift himself, and was feeling for his revolver, when the medicine-man, spread out like a flying squirrel, crashed against him, and placed him temporarily hors de combat.

This was a signal that the medicine-man within was not slow to act on. The braves, too, correctly interpreted the wild cry that shrilled so alarmingly, and followed the lead of the medicine-man in his second dash on the wizard.

Flotsam saw that the jig was up; and that flight was the only course left him. He knew that Seebring had advanced to the lodge and been there discovered.

But he was not to escape. With a quick kick he had turned the contents of the pot into the fire, producing by that movement an appalling sheet of flame; but this artifice did not save him. The Utes had been aroused, and they were not to be frightened so easily, now.

Though he turned to the wall, tearing it away with a firm hand, and tried to leap out and away, they sprung on him like a pack of snarling and enraged wolves, and bore him down.

His head-dress was snatched away, and with it his blanket and other disguises; so that when, an instant later, he was led to the light of a fire, it could be readily seen that he was a white man.

Sam Seebring fared no better. His struggles for liberty had been futile; and he was lying bound before that same fire, when the Wizard Detective was led up to it for an inspection of his features.

Further dissimulation was useless.

"My plague-gone foolishness spoiled the whole biz!" Seebring growled, nodding to his fellow-prisoner. "I wish, when you get a chance, you'd give me a good kicking. I feel the need of it powerful bad! I was a fool for sneaking up there; but I was silly enough to think I was needed. A fool for a pardner is a great misfortune; and you've got a fool for a pardner! Kick me, when ye get a chance! Will ye?"

"I hope you'll not feel bad about it, fer I don't reely think I could have pulled the

game through, anyway. The medicine-men was p'ison suspicious! But I hope we hain't injured the chances of the girls!"

He felt in his inmost heart that they had done so, and was correspondingly depressed. He had counted much on the favorable issue of his ruse; and it distressed him now to know it had so ignobly failed.

However, he was not a man to cry over spilt milk. They had not been immediately slain, and that was something for which to be sincerely thankful. He was a true believer in the axiom, that while there's life there is hope!

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE POWER OF THE UTES.

The terror of Jessie Burnaby and Mary Walden was something dreadful to contemplate, as they listened to the direful sounds proceeding from the council lodge. It was plain that a conflict had occurred and prisoners been taken, and they felt certain these prisoners must be friends from the ducal palace.

Mary Walden put that construction on it, and communicated the belief to Jessie.

They were not long left to doubt. The prisoners were hurried into a lodge adjoining the one they occupied; and there the unhappy men were left, bound and helpless, to ruminate on the uncertainties of all things earthly.

When the yelling and triumphant Utes had withdrawn and the sounds of their footsteps had died out, Mary Walden ventured timidly to address the prisoners in the adjoining lodge.

Although Seebring and Flotsam were sure the young women were somewhere in the village, and had not for a moment doubted they had heard the tumult announcing the captures, they did not dream they were so near.

Therefore, they were both surprised and pleased beyond measure, when Mary's low, but clear, tones reached them.

Sam rolled near the wall of the tent and replied with anxious eagerness, while even Flotsam showed unusual emotion. He lifted his bound hands against his face and endeavored to brush away the tears that flowed unbidden, and which a kindly gleam hid from Seebring's observation. It was a noble weakness, if such it should be called.

"We're all right!" Seebring answered, in as cheery a voice as he could command. "Hit by a streak of cussid bad luck, but hain't any bones broken!"

"It was all my fault, too!" he added, with a tinge of chagrin. "Flotsam, here, was a-carrying things high, and a-bamboozling them reds beautifully; and of course I had to chip in and spoil it all!"

The girls had advanced close up to the wall of their lodge, and a general conversation now took place.

They were not bound, they reported, but they had found it almost impossible to leave their prison, as a keen-eyed squaw was constantly on guard.

"Is she up to snuff, now? For, if she ain't, you might yank off these cords, and we'd all make a break together!"

Jessie Burnaby crept with trembling limbs to the entrance and peered out into the night. The squaw was in her accustomed place, bending forward as if she would catch the words being spoken, and a brawny Ute walked about, restlessly, only a few feet distant.

She slipped back with this information, and the additional statement that she had been detected while peering out.

"No use to try anything, now!" Flotsam advised. "We're in fer it, I calc'late. They're not fools enough to leave us any loop-holes of escape. Not yit, at any rate! A single yelp'd be enough to bring a swarm o' the reds."

It was a plain truth, plainly spoken; but bitter as death.

Again the interrupted conversation flowed on, until every subject of mutual interest had been exhausted.

Day was at hand; and the wearied talkers were trying to gain a little sleep, not knowing what ordeals might await them with the coming of the day.

Scarcely for a moment throughout all those

long hours had the drumming and chanting in the council house ceased. The medicine-men, having reasserted their supremacy and put down the pretender whose tricks they could not approach or understand, were making the best of their new lease on popular favor.

Suddenly the lodge door was darkened, and one of the medicine-men slipped within, and approached Flotsam. The latter had lifted his head, and was staring at the intruder.

Carefully the medicine-man turned about and closed the flap that served for a door. Then he lifted his blanket and drew out the one which the Wizard Detective had worn on entering the village, and which had been snatched at the time of the attack. It still glowed with the phosphorus that had been applied to it.

The medicine-man had been mystified by the strange light which came from the blanket, and still more so by the wonderful tricks he had seen Flotsam perform; and was resolved to gain the benefit of the latter's knowledge, if he could.

"Will my brother tell me why the blanket burns, yet is not consumed, nor does heat come from it?" he queried, speaking in the Ute tongue.

"What's he jabbering about?" Flotsam asked, turning to Seebring for an explanation.

Seebring was not an adept in the use of the Ute dialect, but understood it well enough to gather the medicine-man's meaning, assisted as were the Ute's words by a wealth of signs.

Accordingly he interpreted the question.

"Tell him that I'll show him how to make the fire that does not burn, and also how to do the tree trick which he saw me perform, if—if he will set us free! Not otherwise!"

Seebring volubly explained the communication.

"He says, if you'll make the tree grow right here and now, and show him how to light the unburning fire, he will agree to your desires!"

The prospect seemed so brilliant, that Seebring was all astir.

But the Wizard Detective did not join in this sudden hope, for the reason that he knew he could not, on a moment's notice, comply with the request. He had also a shrewd suspicion that the medicine-man was striving for possession of his secrets, without any real intention of carrying out his part of the contract.

"I can't do it!" he rejoined, much to Seebring's astonishment. "You tell him so, will ye? I can't do it, unless he gives me a chance to prepare for the thing. Why, does he s'pose that I can perform a thing like that off hand?"

Seebring did not know himself how much preparation might be really necessary, much as he had been with the wizard.

"Where did you learn them things?" he asked, on his own account:

"Of the jugglers in India! They're the best in the world, and I was with 'em a long time. But tell the old rascal that I'll show him—Oh, pshaw! What's the use o' talkin' to a man who ain't any more notion of the looks of truth and honor than a rattlesnake has? He wouldn't do a thing fer us! He wouldn't dare!"

The medicine-man had risen to depart; for, though he did not understand Flotsam's words, he did understand the tone in which they were uttered, and knew that his little personal scheme had failed.

Flotsam had gauged him rightly. He had no intention, whatever, of releasing the prisoners, but thought to gain a specious advantage over his rival, the other medicine-man, by extracting from the wonderful white wizard some of the latter's marvelous secrets.

A harsh guttural, that sounded like the growl of a dog, came from somewhere deep down in his throat, as he tucked away the shining blanket, to hide it from the gaze of the curious, and vanished in the outer gloom.

Day dawned shortly after; a not unwelcome thing, for the prisoners had not been able to obtain a wink of sleep.

With its coming a Ute warrior pushed his way into the lodge, and brought the information that further deliberations concerning

them and their fate had been deferred until word could be received from the Duke of Deseret, and that runners had been started to the ducal palace to learn his wishes.

All of which showed that the true relationship existing between themselves and the girls had been discerned by the Indians, and that the fate of all was to be left to the decision of Major Mix. A worse outlook could scarcely have been possible.

Seebring worded the thought of both:

"We must get out o' hyer. We can't expect any mercy from such a hyena!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARK FEELS THE POWER OF THE DUKE.

MARK LANYARD laid his hand tremblingly on the door-bell, and listened with feverish intentness to the "ting-a-ling" that came back in answer.

He stood before the door of his father's house in Salt Lake City—a house he had approached as surreptitiously as if he were a thief. The gloom of night lay about him, untouched by the lights that gleamed from the streets.

He was worn, and perturbed in spirit. He had traveled almost without cessation or rest since quitting his companions on the edge of the lake. And to exhaustion and hunger was added the fear that his mission might after all prove abortive. He had already had good cause to know that the Duke of Deseret was a power in this City of the Beehive.

Nevertheless, he was resolved to implore his father's aid in the present instance, relying on his father's well-known love for him to bring the coveted boon.

A smart servant girl came in answer to the bell, and ushered him into the small parlor, failing utterly to recognize in this dusty wayfarer the son of her employer.

A short time after Mr. Lanyard entered, starting back in violent surprise when he saw who was the visitor.

"Why, Mark!" were the only words he could ejaculate.

"You thought me—not dead, father?" rising to greet him with a show of shy affection.

Instantly all reserve vanished on the part of Mr. Lanyard. Rushing to his son, he clasped him in his arms as if that son were still a child, and strained him to his heaving bosom.

"I feared the worst for you, Mark, my boy! You look as if—as if you had borne fearful privations! Tell me about them!"

Mark returned the hug, and then, in the most matter-of-fact way, said he would first like something to eat.

This being produced, he told the story of his imprisonment and flight and multitudinous adventures since last they had met under that roof, the elder Lanyard listening with a pained expression on his mobile face.

"And now I want you to help me, father! We'll say no more about my disobedience in not going to England, for I shrewdly surmise that you were not yourself over-anxious for me to undertake that trip."

Lanyard glanced about uneasily.

"Be a little cautious, Mark!" he urged. "I've learned that here in Salt Lake it isn't always safe to express one's feelings too freely, even in one's own house! You're sure you were not seen when you came in?"

"Pretty sure," Mark replied, impressed by his father's excessive caution. "Is it so bad as that?"

"It's bad enough!" was the guarded reply.

"Now, what is it you want me to do?"

His face showed he knew well enough what was coming, and was fighting for time for thought.

Mark explained fully the perils surrounding those in the village and those on their way there, and begged that help might be sent them.

"If you will get together ten men, I'll undertake to lead them against the Indians and Major Mix's blacks. Twenty men would be better, but I'll go willingly with only ten."

"I'm very sorry you got into this thing, Mark," Lanyard said, evasively. "It's a very unfortunate occurrence. You know I'd do anything in the world for you, in reason."

"Then why not this?" and there was a sting of anger in the query.

"You don't know what you're asking of me, Mark! You really don't!" appealingly. "I'd like to help you, but—"

He stammered, showing that he found it difficult to explain why.

"But you don't want to. Is that it?"

"I do want to, Mark, and I would if I could. If I could, with safety to myself. You don't know what perils your actions have already plunged me into. I'm only safe because I seem to be holding aloof and giving you no countenance. I acquiesced when you were ordered to England, though I didn't want you to go. And I've kept myself out of the tangle you've fallen into. I had to secure my own safety. I'd like to help you, and—"

Mark cut him short.

"Why not explain the mystery to me? What hold has Mix on you, anyway? Surely, he'll not dare try to harm you here? You have position and influence. Why not defy him?"

Lanyard shook his head.

"You don't understand the character of your request, or you wouldn't make it. I can't help you in this matter, that's the truth of it. I dare not. And oh, Mark! if you desire my welfare, can you not—"

"He was going to say 'drop it?' when Mark's flaming face caused him to leave the sentence unfinished.

"You are in debt to him?"

"More than in debt! I would explain, but I fear to."

"Well, I'll not drop it!" Mark exclaimed, with stern emphasis. "My God, father! you don't know what you're asking me! Leave them women out there in that horrid place? Abandon the friends who are working with me for their rescue? I wouldn't do it if a hundred Mixes stood in my way! If you won't, or can't, help me, I'll go it alone! But"—and here his voice broke—"it seems to me you might help me, if you only would! Defy him to do his worst!"

"You don't know what you ask, Mark!" and the unhappy father turned his face aside and groaned in the deep anguish of his spirit. "Believe me, I would do what you ask if I dared. I don't dare. That's the sum and substance of it."

He seemed to feel his abasement, and because of it shrunk from meeting the gaze of his son.

"I will give you money—anything—but cannot personally help you!" he said after a painful silence. "Perhaps the money will do for you what I fear to. Money is a power!"

"I don't ask you to suffer in my behalf," Mark returned, touched by the exhibition. "I will take the money; yes! As you say, it is a power!"

"I will get it for you, then!" rising, as if to move away. "A couple of hundred dollars will be enough at present, I suppose? It is the best I can do on so short a notice!"

He was waiting for Mark's reply; which did not come. A loud rapping was heard at the door.

Lanyard turned deathly pale, but advanced to open it.

As he drew it back, both saw in the hall a body of men. A look was enough to reveal them as officers.

Mark rose in alarm.

"We have come for *him!*" the leader declared, pointing to Mark. "But a few moments ago knowledge came to us that he had come back to the city. He has disobeyed the commands of his superiors, and must suffer!"

Mark knew that pleading would be of all things vain. These men would not hearken. He did not doubt they were themselves the mere tools of another, and that that other was Major Mix, the powerful Duke of Deseret.

He was right in his surmise.

These men had been on the watch for him ever since his hasty departure from the city; they had detected him as he entered his father's house; and were now there for the purpose of laying hands on him. Ostensibly, they were acting in the interest of the Church, whose authority young Lanyard had defied; but in reality they were acting for the duke, and using the Church as a cloak.

Mr. Laynard retreated and threw an arm protectingly about his son.

"You shall not take him!" he declared, all his nature rising in rebellion. "Not from my house!"

The leader of the ruffianly band greeted the assertion with an open sneer.

"Who are you, to thus defy us?"

"I am his father!" was the simple answer.

"We'll have him, anyway!" advancing, threateningly, while his followers crowded close behind. "We'll see who is in authority here! Men, do your duty!"

It was not a time for indecision. Mark saw that he was to be dragged off and again thrown into prison; which would be the end of his efforts to aid the friends so far away. So he tore loose from his father's clasp, and, with a bound, went through the nearest window.

The act was so unlooked for that it succeeded; and Mark was sprawling on the soft soil of the garden before the rascals could fairly comprehend what had occurred.

Then the leader gathered his wits together and shouted:

"After him! Don't let him get away!"

A pair of the most daring sprung through the broken window—for Mark had carried away sash and panes in his desperate leap—while the others ran for the front door by way of the corridor.

Mr. Lanyard was left standing, dazed and alone, in the room.

As for Mark, he no sooner struck the ground, than he scrambled up again and ran for the garden fence at his best speed.

He had surmounted the wall and was flying down the dark street, before the pursuers had gained the garden.

Those leaping through the window caught a glimpse of his receding form and did not hesitate to fire a shot or two at it; though they were of no effect, except to alarm and fill with fear the heart of the elder Lanyard.

This gentleman staggered blindly out of the house, crazed by the thought that Mark might at that moment be lying dead, cut down by those murderous balls. But he was quickly reassured by the vigorous orders of the leader and the hasty sounds of pursuit.

And so Mark Lanyard sped away into the night from the home of his youth and the place where he had fondly hoped for aid, out into the sheltering darkness that lay beyond the glare of the street lamps; and after him raced the ruffians who had sought violently to lay hands on him.

His mission home had been a miserable failure.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PERILOUS UNDERTAKING.

THIS bitter experience revealed to Mark Lanyard the utter hopelessness and uselessness of trying to obtain help in the city. The influence of the duke seemed overwhelmingly strong; so much so, that it was foolish to think of contending against it.

If he had been able to obtain the money his father intended to give him, he would not have despaired even yet; but without money, the case looked dark. And he did not dare to return to the house to get it.

There was apparently nothing for him to do but to return to his friends, Flotsam and Seebring, and confess to them his inability, and engage with them in a personal effort to rescue his sweetheart and Mary Walden from the hands of Major Mix.

His own safety was not yet assured, however, as he was painfully made aware by the clatter of running feet behind him and the exclamations that now and then reached him.

He turned into a by-street, as he bounded on, and soon these ominous sounds grew indistinct, and finally died out altogether. He breathed freer, and stopped in the shade of some cottonwoods growing by an irrigating ditch to rest and shape a plan of action.

Then he plunged on again, turning toward the desert, but avoiding the main trail and keeping in the direction of the lake.

At the crossing of the Jordan, he refreshed himself by copious draughts from the cool waters brought from the sweet Utah Lake. He had a small quantity of food, which he ate; and then, after a refreshing shower of

the water on his feverish face and head, tramped on again.

His desire to be of assistance to the woman he loved, so upbore him that for some hours he pressed on without seeming fatigue; and, as the day dawned, he fell in company with a man traveling in the same direction, who proved to be friendly.

This man Mark fought shy of, until he was certain he was a stranger, and therefore presumably not an enemy. He might not have revealed himself even then, but that the having of an extra horse by this man urged him to it.

Besides, the man was kindly of face, and had an open, charitable look; the look that betokens a good man—a man whom you can trust.

"Mount the beast, friend!" the stranger cried, seeing that Mark was afoot, and looked toil-worn.

Mark needed no second bidding; and though the animal was without a saddle, and with only a rope for a bridle, he thought he had never sat on a horse that rode easier.

The conversation that ensued showed that the stranger, who gave his name as Cornelius Sunderland, was a traveling elder of the Mormon Church, then on his way to a small hamlet in the valley east of the lake and south of the Jordan. And Mark learned, too, with a thrill of fright, that this man was well acquainted with his father.

But the kindness of the man's face and manner reassured him. Here, he felt, was a friend to trust.

Feeling his way, he finally unbosomed himself to the elder; told him of his hopes and fears; and of the nature of his mission.

Sunderland looked grave.

"I wish I could help you, Friend Lanyard!" he said, his face glowing with unfeigned sympathy. "I will, so far as in me lies."

"I must reach my appointed place to-morrow, but I will go as far as I can in your direction, and give you the service of my horse. Nay! Nay! Do not refuse that! I shall not need him! And you can return him to me at your leisure!"

"That Duke of Deseret has been a great curse to this country!"

The last was said in an undertone, and with a sad shake of the head, as Mark was proceeding to load him with thanks.

Mark caught the words, and was emboldened to ask:

"Can you explain to me the power which the duke wields over my father?"

Sunderland gave a moment to thought.

"Ay! I can!"

"Your father, in the first place, owes him much money. But that of itself would not tempt him to turn against his son. He was inveigled into joining the murderous band—which, as a Mormon, I denounce!—the band known as the Danites. He drew out of it, as soon as its purpose was made clear to him; but not until he had committed certain deeds which will stain his character as long as he lives."

"The duke knows of this; and both know the day is coming when the Danites will be brought to judgment. That is his hold on him. He fears the duke, on account of many things, but chiefly on account of that!"

The revelation gave Mark much cause for thought; and his questions were many.

By mid-afternoon they reached the shore of the lake, near the point where Seebring and Flotsam had crossed.

Here the Mormon elder, who had shown himself a kind, just and fearless man, turned toward the mountains wherein lay his work; and Mark sought for a chance to cross the lake. He no longer needed the elder's horse, for the elder's sympathies had been so wrought on by Mark's story that he had come much further with the young man than he had at first intended.

The elder also left a quantity of food in Mark's hands, before riding away, together with a small but effective pistol.

"I am not a man of blood!" he explained, as he gave Mark the weapon. "Nor would I assist another who was. But you may need this as a means of defense. Take it! and may the Lord be with you!"

Mark found the boat which the blacks had used in their return across the lake, and confiscated it to his own use.

That night, near the hour of midnight, so

rapidly had he traveled, he lay beneath the lone sage on the border of the Ute village, in the place which Seebring had occupied the night before, and looked out anxiously and earnestly at the tepees.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE GREAT SALT LAKE.

"WHAT was that?"

As Seebring whispered the question, the heavy hand of Flotsam was laid firmly across his mouth.

A suggestive scratching, so low as to be heard with difficulty, came from the tent covering near their heads.

Both were listening intently, when it was repeated.

The Wizard Detective rolled over and thrust his head against the skin forming there the tent wall.

"Who's there?"

The words were breathed so lowly that they could not have been caught by any one two feet distant.

"It's a friend! That is, if you are Flotsam; as I think!"

Flotsam's hand clasped Seebring's shoulder with a nervous grip.

"Lanyard's out there!" was his information. "I low he's come to git us out o' this snarl."

The runners had not yet returned from the ducal palace, though they were hourly expected.

Again the detective applied his mouth to the wall and whispered, this time communicating to Mark such knowledge as was needed to guide him in his movements for their release.

The Ute guard was still in his place in front of the tepee, and the squaw set over the women was presumably still diligent in the discharge of her duties, so that every movement needed to be executed with the utmost care.

Flotsam's whispered words had barely ceased, when there came to the strained ears of the listeners, the sounds of a keen-bladed knife eating insidiously through the skin of the lodge.

Soon a long slit appeared, and when this was drawn open they saw Mark Lanyard's head and shoulders dimly outlined in the aperture.

"How are you fixed?" was his cautious inquiry.

"Tied up like a couple o' Thanksgivin' turkeys! Run yer knife through these hyer cords lively, then we'll try to git at the girls!"

Mark felt about in the gloom till his hands fell on the cords, which he severed with the same caution already shown. The bonds of the prisoners dropped away, and they slowly rose to their feet, feeling stiff and sore for the long confinement.

"You worked that fine as a fiddle!" Flotsam declared, commendingly. "Perhaps you'd better undertake to reach and rescue the women."

He felt almost too shaky to attempt it himself; but clutched with nervous energy the pistol that Mark had thrust into his hands, and glanced toward the lodge entrance, where he momentarily feared to see the Ute.

But no suspicious sound had reached the alert ears of the red-skinned warrior, who was at that moment absorbed in thoughts of the words and prophecies of the medicine-men. In anticipation, he beheld the attack on the village, saw the red flames of burning buildings leap laughingly to kiss the midnight sky, and heard, as if it were sweetest music, the frightened screams of women and children and the groans of the dying.

Flotsam and Seebring held themselves in readiness to leap to Mark's assistance in case of some *contretemps*, or unforeseen danger. The sleeping girls might awaken with a start and cry out, and so reveal everything.

Matters, however, could not have worked more satisfactorily. The very fears of the girls, which had held them sleepless, made the task of rescue easy. They arose, at the word of caution and command; and though every fiber of their natures thrilled like smitten harp-strings with excitement, joy and fear, they yet managed to hold their feelings in check; and without even a whispered

word of inquiry, followed Mark through the opening he had quickly slit in the wall of the tepee.

The squaw slept like a log on the earthen floor, the soundness of her slumber being attested by frequent snorts and groans. She had been worn out by her many hours of watching, and now failed in her vigilance at the crucial moment.

The anticipation of the coming of help, bred in the minds of the girls by the assuring words of Seebring and the Wizard Detective, had prevented them from showing undue agitation when Mark appeared so suddenly before them.

The three were no sooner outside, than they were joined by the liberated prisoners from the other lodge.

Flotsam obligingly moved aside into the deeper shadows, the gloom hiding the suspicious moisture in his eyes.

"God bless 'em!" was his fervent thought. "The girls fer angels, an' the boys fer the brave men an' gentlemen that they are! I ain't too old to remember that I was young onc't, myself!"

There was little time for love-making, or endearing talk and joyful exclamatory whispers; and Flotsam, realizing this, was speedily back in their midst, urging a hasty departure.

"Better cut sticks while we can!" he advised. "They's no tellin' when that ugly buck will show his phiz around hyer!"

He set the example by stepping softly away over the sand; an example which the others instantly imitated.

A light still burned in the council-lodge, and a low buzz of conversation told that some of the restless warriors, and perhaps the medicine-men, were still there, engaged in discussing important movements.

Our friends had almost reached the limits of the village, and were correspondingly elated, when they were thrown into confusion by a mongrel dog that leaped out at them from one of the lodges near which they were stealing.

The dog barked furiously, making frenzied dashes and retreats; and it was plain his actions would soon attract undesirable attention.

It seemed useless to linger in an attempt to mollify him, and equally useless to continue their previous slow movement in the hope of slipping away unobserved. Therefore, they leaped forward in a quick run, trusting in the protection of the shadows of night.

But the dog pursued them with great fury and energy, and sounds began to reach them from the tepees showing that the Utes were becoming aroused.

Flotsam halted a moment and looked back at the council-lodge, and at that instant saw the medicine-men and warriors stream out and hurry in the direction of the barking. Guided by the dog, he saw that they would have no difficulty whatever in following the trail of the fugitives.

It was apparently a reckless thing to do, but in fact the only safe course, and he lifted the revolver and dropped the yelping animal dead on the sand with a single shot.

Instantly the entire village was in an uproar.

Armed Utes, many of them half-dressed, ran out of the lodges and gathered in excited bands, as if in anticipation of an attack.

The medicine-men, however, and the warriors who had issued from the council-house, came straight on, rightly divining the cause of the shot. A glance into the empty prison-lodges, as they passed them, served to confirm their worst suspicions.

Then their yells arose loud and frenziedly, and, being joined by a number of others, they hurried on to the point from which the shot had come.

Another series of yells startled the still air when they came on the body of the dog.

But the escaping prisoners were already several hundred yards away, and, guided by Sam Seebring, who knew the surrounding country like a book, were making desperate efforts to baffle pursuit.

They did not proceed straight onward, but, turning, ran at right angles to the village street; and, when further out on the plain, again changed their line of flight.

It was quick, taxing work; so brisk, in

fact, that but for the supporting arms of Sam and Mark, the scared and panting women would have been unequal to it. But they held up bravely and with all the fortitude of heroines, giving their escort as little trouble as possible.

It was a time to try the nerve and courage of the bravest and most enduring.

Befriended by the darkness, they succeeded so well in eluding the Utes, that when they had placed a mile of distance between them and the village, they halted for a period in the shelter of a high growth of sage, remaining there until they felt sufficiently rested to continue the flight.

From this point Seebring headed straight away for the narrow end of the lake, meaning to strike it at the place of landing.

It was a long and weary tramp across the sand flats and alkali wastes, and Mary Walden and Jessie Burnaby had almost reached the limits of their endurance when the reedy shore was gained.

The rosy dawn had already flushed the eastern sky, and day was at hand, when they sunk down on the yielding cushion of sand, feeling that not even for life itself could they walk another mile.

Here the men hurried off to search for the concealed boat, Flotsam looking along the shore just in front while Seebring went up the lake and Mark down.

So nearly alike were all the landmarks of that flat shore, that it was really a difficult matter to determine on their exact location in the indistinctness of the early dawn.

More than a half hour was spent in the search, but it was a half hour not wholly lost, as it brought rest to the weary women.

Not until the sun had shot above the eastern range of hills, lighting up the lake and the broad bowl of the valley, did a shout announce the finding of the boat.

It came from Mark, and a little later he was seen wading through the shallow water along the shore, towing the boat after him.

This welcome sight, added to the refreshing rest they had enjoyed, filled the young women with new spirit; and when the boat was brought to the point of land nearest them, they expressed their eager readiness to undertake the journey across the lake.

But though the way of escape seemed open, they were not to get off so easily. They had scarcely pulled away from the shore, when a loud yell announced their discovery by the Utes. This came from the rising ground to the southward; and when they looked in that direction, they saw more than a dozen of their pursuers swarm into view over the crest of a low ridge.

The Utes had shrewdly guessed that the fleeing whites would make for the margin of the lake, for that offered the only escape from the desolation of the all encompassing desert, in whose depths life could not be sustained.

Therefore, when they lost the trail in the baffling darkness, a few were left to search it out and follow more leisurely in the morning, while the others hurried lakeward.

They had struck the shore two or three miles below the point where the whites had emerged from the plain, and had thence ascended, scrutinizing the banks closely for signs of the fugitives.

As made known by their announcing yell, they now saw the boat as it swung out from the land.

"If they haven't a boat of their own, we're all right. If they have, we've got to race for it!"

With this declaration, the Wizard Detective dipped his oars deeply and threw all his strength into the stroke.

It was a plain statement of the dangers of the situation, dangers he did not think it necessary or advisable to conceal.

Seebring and Mark also bent willingly to the work, and the boat, though heavily laden, leaped through the water at a promising rate of speed.

As they were seated with faces toward the shore, they could readily observe every movement of their enemies; and it was with some anxiety that they saw a number of the Utes hurry toward a rocky point with an appearance of confidence.

But the boat which the Utes plainly expected to find there was gone.

The whites understood how this had occurred, when they saw, a short time later, a

boat putting in to shore a mile or so further up the lake.

It held the runners who had been dispatched to the ducal palace, and two negro oarsmen. The runners had taken the boat, and in it had crossed the lake on their errand.

All this time the fugitives were putting yard after yard between them and the rapidly-receding shore.

Some of the exasperated Utes, made desperate by a sense of their inability to begin an immediate pursuit, rushed recklessly into the water, as if they vainly hoped to overtake the whites by swimming.

At this exhibition of insanity, a roar of derisive laughter broke from the lips of Flotsam. This spontaneous guffaw rendered his appearance so ridiculous, daubed as he still was with paint and feathers, that the other members of the boat's company could not refrain from smiles, serious as was the situation.

A couple of the Utes raced away at headlong speed toward the boat putting in to shore, endeavoring by loud outcries to attract the attention of the boat's occupants and induce them to row in that direction. But this effort failed, and they were preforced to continue on.

Neither the runners nor the negroes had noticed what was occurring on the lake and its margin; and they landed and drew the boat high up on the bank.

Then, catching sight of the yelling and excited runners, they stood undeterminedly until the latter reached them.

The boat was now shoved quickly back into the water, and the six, taking seats therein, pulled swiftly out into the lake, heading so as to intercept the daring swimmers, meaning to take these aboard and add them to the chasing crew.

But so much time had already been lost, and so much more was lost by this deviation from the direct line of pursuit, that the whites had succeeded in making a very respectable offing.

They were now two miles or more from the shore, and a good mile and a half from the pursuing craft. It was an advantage not to be despised.

"Come on, you red rascals!" exclaimed Seebring, shaking a fist defiantly.

Then, remembering that a stern chase is a long one, he set his teeth firmly and strained at the oars until they bent like tightened bows.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

It was not only to be a long chase, but an exciting one. There were eight men in the pursuing boat, all strong, muscular fellows. The exceeding buoyancy of the waters of the salt lake, which had aided the fugitives in gaining so excellent a start, was now of equal assistance to the Utes. Deeply laden as was the boat of the Indians, it rode the waves like a cork, and the energetic strokes of the oarsmen sent it forward at a marvelous pace.

Jessie Burnaby and Mary Walden had been watching with intense earnestness and almost bated breath the comparative advance of the competing crafts; and they now saw, with a feeling of anxiety not unmixed with fear, that the Ute boat was slowly but surely gaining on their own.

Their inability to assist in this emergency, and the fact that they were but dead weights on the energies of their friends, sorely tried their spirits.

More than once they had implored to be given each an oar that they might assist in the rowing. Now they renewed their petitions.

"You really couldn't help the wu'th of a mite!" Flotsam affirmed, bending on them a look of mingled admiration and pity. "We haven't but the three pairs of oars, as you can see!"

He seemed always to regard them as mere children, and never more so than at this moment.

"But we might relieve you a little," and Jessie reached out a hand as if she would take one of his oars.

To her surprise and confusion, he permitted the oar to drift for a second, and bending forward pressed a kiss on her lips.

She drew back with a burning glance, amazed and abashed. Mark's face also flushed a little; but the Wizard Detective seemed to heed the looks and glances of no one; and bent again to the oars in a strangely subdued manner.

"Beg pardon!" he said, finally, as if suddenly arousing from a dream. "I'm an old fool, I guess!"

Then he turned his eyes toward the pursuing boat, and again his long oar-strokes fell with the regularity of clock work, and with almost the power of the wheels of a propeller.

When another mile had been passed over, the boat of the Utes had so gained that it was rendered certain the fugitives could not cross the narrow point of the lake before being overtaken.

Therefore they headed away for the low-lying island, whereon the negroes had stopped when they crossed the lake with the girls.

"I 'low we can make that!" and Flotsam threw a look over his shoulders at the speck of land, which rose so slightly above the water that it was scarcely visible. "We'll land there, and stand the beggars off, er make a most desperate try of it!"

The island was not so far away as it seemed, and less than an hour's hard pulling brought them abreast of it; whence they turned into the opening that had been utilized by the negroes.

"If we only had plenty of guns and ammunition!" was Seebring's inward comment, as he sprung ashore and assisted the women from the boat. "If only we was in fighting trim. But, hang it! what can we do, with only one pistol and a couple of knives? We might as well throw up hands and quit!"

But Seebring was not naturally a grumbler, and even though the case seemed so desperate, he was not willing to surrender without a fight; and saw as clearly as any one that the course pursued was the only one left open to them.

However, he had not fully taken into consideration the ingenuity and fertility of resource of the Wizard Detective. The latter was a host in himself.

The boat holding the Utes and the negroes came to a halt when a hundred yards from the shore, the occupants being evidently unsettled as to the proper and safe thing to be done.

Although the refugees on the island were short of ammunition and effective weapons, yet the quick perceptions of the Wizard Detective enabled him to suggest a means of defense which possessed at least the quality of originality.

Unlike most of the islands, and the shores of the Great Salt Lake, this island held a growth of long, light, bamboo-like reeds, that were filled with an inflammable, resinous pitch.

Flotsam cut down a number of these, formed them into lengths suitable for his purpose, and with the knife hollowed out cavities in the smaller or tapering end of each.

Then from one of the pockets of his coat he drew out a quantity of explosive material, which he had brought for the purpose of frightening the Indians and to assist in certain tricks of magic that he thought he might wish to perform. He had not used it thus far, though the frightful bombs containing the Greek Fire had held something like it.

"Bear a hand here!" he said, beckoning to the young men and the girls. "Take knives or sticks, or anything you can get and dig out holes like these. See!"

The Indians still fought shy of landing, for they knew not how hot a reception might await them, should they put foot on the island. But it was useless to expect that this hesitancy would long exist. They would certainly form some plan of assault; and probably come with a rush, when they did come.

What caused the Utes and negroes to become so suddenly fearful was a knowledge of the fact that though they outnumbered the whites, the latter would fight like frenzied tigers when driven to bay, and would also have the advantage of the concealment afforded by the rushes.

It is not in the nature of an Indian to court unseen and hidden dangers; and in this in-

stance, as was to be expected, the blacks showed the most courage. Had they been led by the redoubtable Prince George, they would have charged the island with reckless bravery.

It required but a few moments to prepare the reeds in accordance with the instructions of the Wizard Detective, and, when this was done, the latter had his companions assist him in filling the cavities with the explosive material he had brought to light.

He was in reality fashioning a number of rude rockets; and he completed the work by attaching to each a guiding tail formed of the rushes' feathery tops. This he deemed necessary to hold them in a direct line of flight.

Mark Lanyard had some matches in an oil-skin case, and gave one to Flotsam, at the latter's request.

All had watched his movements with the most intense eagerness, not fully knowing what he meant to do, though they were ready to trust implicitly the marvelous ingenuity he had always shown when circumstances cramped him into a tight place.

"Open on them red and black niggers with the pistol, Sam!" was his low growl, as the match flamed in his hand, and he applied it to the improvised rocket. "If I'm not much mistaken, we'll shake the rascals out of that boat in about a jiffy!"

Seebring, in response, lifted the weapon, and with a quick aim fired at the youth who sat in the prow. The aim was not bad, but still not sufficiently accurate to do execution. The ball plowed the waters of the lake a few yards to the right of the boat, causing the occupants to drop down as if they expected a volley.

Then, with an ominous, hissing rush, and a scream that was little short of terrorizing, the rocket shot across the waves in a wavering, parabolic curve, and dropped with an explosive splutter into the lake just in front of the boat, throwing up a shower of spray that fell like a dash of rain on those within it.

Again and again Seebring fired his revolver, at the detective's command, while the latter lighted and directed the rockets at the boat.

The heavens seemed alive with screaming, hissing serpents, that writhed and wavered in snaky sinuosities out from the reedy island, and dropped in a hail of sputtering flame about the terrified Utes and negroes.

These did no execution, but one of the Utes got a bullet in his shoulder from Seebring's pistol; and with many exclamations of fright, they pulled away from the fear inspiring vicinity.

The Wizard Detective observed this movement with a mellow, chuckling laugh, and sped another rocket after them to hurry their departure.

"They'll not bother us any more for a time," he asserted; "and while they're figgerin' on the situation, and tryin' to cipher it out, we'd better move our boat up off the sand. If they hadn't been blamed fools, they'd a' gobbled it the first jump. Then they would have had us!"

The wisdom of this was so apparent that the boat was immediately drawn from the beach and carried, not without difficulty, far back among the reeds.

The island was but a small one, and the boat, on which their chances of escape depended, was now almost in the center, and could therefore be moved to either side as necessity might dictate.

The scared Utes showed no disposition to advance again upon the island, but the boat hovered in the vicinity throughout the remainder of the day the occupants signaling from time to time to the Indians on the main land.

Their manner of doing this was rather ingenious.

The water was shoal near the island, and a quantity of sand was brought up by diving. This was placed in the bottom of the boat; and on it a fire was built, the materials having been obtained by tearing away some ornamental work about the boat's prow, and by sacrificing a portion of the thwarts.

The fuel they furnished by this means they damped, thus causing it to send up a

heavy, black smoke that could be seen for miles.

But this was not the limit of their signaling. A blanket was brought into use; and by it the smoke was made to tell the story of their needs and situation.

By holding the blanket down over the smoke, and then suddenly slipping it aside, huge puffs of smoke were made to ascend, and by the frequency of their repetition were made to deliver a message to the Utes.

This simple mode of telegraphing information over long distances is in universal use among the Indians of the plains and mountains, and has been for many years, and by means of it, and a preconcerted code of signals, known only to themselves, the Apaches of the arid Arizona mountains were so long able to defy the Government troops.

Our friends on the island watched the signaling of the party in the boat with much anxiety. If the assistance sought came speedily, they were doomed. They might hold the boat's crew at bay, but they could not hope to drive back the force that would then come against them.

But for all the uneasiness manifested and felt, it was not an unhappy day. In truth, to the young people it was one of the pleasantest days of their lives. Though confronted by peril, they were together, and love is of itself sufficient to drive back and dissipate the blackest shadows, and to set the star of hope in the darkest night.

Flotsam did not seem displeased at the love-making which was carried on so openly before him. His mutterings were frequent; and even while most anxiously studying the boat and the puffs of ascending smoke, a smile now and then twisted his features awry.

He had taken time to wash in the lake, and so had removed the coppery paint that had so liberally smeared his hands and face. He had removed the down from his hair, and cast aside the hawk feathers that he had vainly relied on when posing as the Ute medicine prophet.

The only water to be had was the little that remained in Mark Lanyard's canteen, and though it was used sparingly, it was exhausted before the day was half spent. They had sufficient food to last a day or two, but water was what they most craved, and none was to be had on the island. To touch the water of the lake would only have been to increase the tortures of their thirst.

And so the day wore slowly away, and when the afternoon was half spent, one of the Utes was seen to lower himself from the boat, holding on to a bit of board, and to launch out boldly for the far distant shore.

The columns of smoke had failed to attract the attention expected, and this Ute, who was a bold swimmer, was now to attempt the task of swimming to the land to bring the help that was desired.

"If he'd a' tried that two hours ago, it might have worked," was Seebring's thoughtful comment. "But it'll rush him to make the land and git back hyer before night, and they've got to make it before night, or they'll not find us at home!"

The proposed feat of the Ute swimmer was one that few men would have cared to undertake, for the distance to be traversed was so great that the shore line only showed as a cloudy blue band low down on the western horizon.

The whites on the island watched his progress keenly and as interestedly as did his fellow Utes, and could not repress a feeling of admiration for the rapid manner in which he got through the water.

There is no body of water easier to swim in than the Great Salt Lake of Utah, if the swimmer thoroughly understands its characteristics; and no body of water presents greater difficulties to the inexperienced. Its very buoyancy upsets the most careful calculations of one who is accustomed only to the waters of American rivers; and such a one, on essaying to strike out, is quite likely to find himself standing on his head with heels protruding comically from the waves, unable to right himself and in danger of drowning.

The Ute swimmer seemed scarcely to need the board, which he had taken as a precautionary support; and his vigorous strokes soon took him far out from the island.

Seebring watched the black head until it

could no longer be seen above the curl of the light waves, then turned to those about him.

"He may make it before dark, for he's cuttin' through the water like a human shark! I guess we'd better git that boat down to t'other shore, and have it ready to pull off in, if we see the need of it!"

This they did but though the sun sunk lower and lower, and finally touched the rim of hills to the westward, and then sunk from sight, the Utes from the shore had not yet been seen.

Our friends were able to descry, a few minutes later, a black line of boats moving forward, but still a long distance away—boats which the Utes had brought that afternoon from the landing near the village.

Though the gathering shadows made it difficult to discern the advancing boats, the waiting Utes saw them, and sent up a shout that echoed suggestively across the island. At the same time, they took up their oars and pulled nearer in.

Little preparation was needed by the occupants of the island, and they stood awaiting the slow coming of darkness.

The Wizard Detective got ready another bunch of rockets; and fired one at intervals to make the boat's crew think there was no intention held of abandoning the island. A fire was also kindled, to still further deceive them.

But the shadows had no sooner thickened sufficiently to make the venture safe, than our friends crept quietly down to the shore, and, embarking, pulled stealthily out on the waters.

The Utes were evidently fearful of this, and for some little time had been rowing about suspiciously, hoping to prevent anything of the kind and to hold the whites prisoners on the island until the appearance of the expected aid.

Thus it came about that the boat from the island had not gone a hundred yards until it was discovered, and a chase again commenced.

The advantage was, however, on the side of those endeavoring to escape. The darkness was constantly growing, with a promise of a night of inky blackness.

As soon as discovered, they veered their course, dipped their oars softly, and had the supreme satisfaction of seeing the boat of the Utes race off in the wrong direction.

They were congratulating themselves on the success of the maneuver, when the dreaded boat loomed up before them and not twenty yards away.

A yell showed they were discovered, and at this Seebring fired his weapon straight at the boat's occupants, at the same time calling on his friends to lie down.

A shower of bullets and arrows hurtled into and about the boat of our friends, though no one was struck; and the Utes, not caring for so close a fight, shifted their course and drew away, intending, as could be observed, to hover near until the coming of their reinforcements.

But again the darkness aided the fugitives, and, after pulling in absolute silence for a few minutes, they found they had once more given the Utes the slip.

Then Seebring aided more by a subtle instinct than anything else, for the blackness was like a wall, headed the little craft away for the eastern shore.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE DESERT.

"See that!" was Mark Lanyard's exclamation.

A point of light had glowed for an instant on the lake a half mile distant, followed shortly after by another very much further off.

"I reckon you know what it means?" said Mark. "The other red rascals are at hand, and the two lots of them have set to signaling to each other."

Proof of this was soon given, when additional signal fires blazed in a semicircle from near and far. There were six boats in all, as shown by these momentary lights, quite enough to overwhelm the small force of fugitives.

"I guess we'll not go to burnin' any red fire or shootin' wild rockets!" the Wizard De-

tective dryly observed. "We'll let them take a hitch at that. If they keep it up right along, we'll be mighty apt to know where they are and what they're up to!"

There was some comfort in the thought, even though they could not be sure that all the boats of the enemy had engaged in the signaling.

What startled them most was the rapidity with which the boats from the shore had gained the vicinity of the island. It argued ill for the whites, should a race be forced. But they trusted to a continuation of the exceeding darkness to aid them, relying more on that than all else.

Nor did it fail them. The signal-lights were not repeated for some time, and when they were they revealed the gratifying fact that the Utes had strung their boats out in a long line, which was slowly moving eastward.

Seeing this, and feeling that it would now be safe to do some free rowing, Flotsam, Mark and Seebring bent to the oars and pulled for the distant shore with lighter hearts. There seemed now small likelihood that the Utes would be able to discover them.

The fog that had given them such friendly shelter rolled away after awhile, and the twinkling stars came out in the deep vault of the sky, scintillating with the peculiar brilliancy observable in desert and semi-desert climates.

No sight or sound came, however, to tell of the location of the boats of the Utes.

"I guess we've left 'em!" was Seebring's comforting reflection, and it did indeed seem that this was the case, as minute after minute passed without any indication of the whereabouts of the enemy.

They knew not how far they were from the shore; but, inasmuch as Seebring desired to effect a landing further toward the north, they pulled away in that direction.

Hour after hour they moved onward, in this manner, feeling the sense of security momentarily grow. They talked much in low tones, and even indulged in occasional light laughter. But for the tormenting thirst that never left them, they might have been quite contented and happy.

But it was useless to land near there and search for water, Seebring said, for none was to be found, and, as he had been over nearly the whole of the country, this dictum was not for an instant combated.

As the excitement which had upheld them began to dissipate in this unwontedly peaceful air, the entire party became aware of the extreme weariness, the fatigue and exhaustion of body and mind, under which they labored. An intense longing for sleep also assailed them; a longing they found difficult to resist.

Cushioned beds were formed for the girls in the bottom of the boat, Flotsam and the lovers contributing their coats for the purpose. Then the rowers pulled on, hoping by a continuation of their heavy task to drive away the wish for sleep.

But they could not; and Sam Seebring finally and reluctantly gave the command to head straight for the shore.

It was not far distant, as they now discovered. In fact they were between two headlands, and the shore less than a mile away. Having gained it, they drew the boat up as high as they could, secured it from drifting, and tumbling down heavily on the sand, sought the sleep they felt they must have or die.

The day was far advanced, when they came out of this lethargic slumber. The Wizard Detective was the first to awaken.

He scanned the lake with his keen old eyes; and, seeing nothing to occasion uneasiness, turned his gaze on the sleeping forms near. His looks lingered longest and fondest on the face and figure of Jessie Burnaby.

"Yes, it's her!" he whispered his lips compressed and working strangely. "I've had some doubts, but I haven't any longer. It's her! And she ought to know it! Will she be pleased, I wonder?"

She stirred uneasily, as if his thoughts of her were disturbing influences; and, as he still gazed, opened her eyes and returned the look.

He turned his head away to hide the emotion he could not otherwise conceal. Then

he called, in low whispers, for Seebring and Mark to "shake" themselves and get ready for the duties before them.

Seebring had no sooner got on his feet and taken a survey at the surrounding landmarks, than he started toward the adjacent hills at a good gait, and returned shortly thereafter with a canteen full of water.

"There's a fine spring over there!" he declared, as he politely extended the canteen to the long suffering girls. "We'll not die for water, anyway! I didn't know we was so far down. We must a' pulled like good fellows last night!"

He was in the best of spirits. He had already satisfied his thirst at the spring, and felt like a new man.

It was not desired to remain there longer than was felt to be necessary; and, as Seebring proclaimed that he was able to guide the party to a point that might be readily defended, they made preparations to depart.

"You see, it's jist this way!" he explained. "I've prospected over these hills till I know nigh about every foot of 'em. As I said, I didn't think we was this far down, but, bein' this far down, I calculate it wouldn't be a bad idee to make a bee line fer a certain shanty that I built out hyer more'n two months ago."

"It's right across yonder, on the border of the desert. I fancied I'd struck signs of pay dirt, and after awhile I located a vein; and I built a shanty on the spot, expectin' to do a considerable amount of work there by and by."

"I never done the work, but mebbe the shanty'll come in handy now and pay me fer the time I put on it! If you say, 'Go ahead!' I'll p'int my nose fer that!"

The boat was concealed as well as was possible in the thin growth of blasted sage and weeds that grew in the alkaline soil, and an effort was made to efface all signs of their landing and presence there.

The pains might have been spared for, when they mounted the ridge, that rose like a wall near the lake, and which the line of flight compelled them to cross, they were sighted by a boat load of Utes.

There were two other boat loads near, all sneaking down the shore of the lake, looking with prying eyes for some indication of the presence of the party that had so cleverly slipped from their grasp.

Their jubilant cries now rung wildly over the water, summoning all the boats that were within hearing distance, and the oarsmen, inspired by the unexpected sight that greeted them, bent to the oars with a keen willingness that promised much.

The discovery was a startling surprise to the fugitives who were beginning to think themselves safe from all danger of successful pursuit.

Mary and Jessie were hurried across the ridge out of sight and their companions and protectors crept back to the summit to discern what the Utes meant to do.

The boats were already heading in to shore, and there was but one resource left; and that was instant flight.

This was made known to Jessie and Mary, though the information was tempered with words of encouragement and cheer and then the flight through the desert began.

By dint of many turnings and twistings, Seebring, who had again taken the lead, managed to lead his little party of followers by a route that promised to be exceedingly baffling to the Utes. Stony terraces and hillsides were sought, and pebbly plateaus that would show not a trace of their passages.

But in spite of all a triumphant yell ever and anon warned them that the savages following like well trained hounds on a hot scent, were puzzling out the baffling trail with unerring certainty.

"There it is!" Seebring exclaimed, with a little thrill of triumph supporting the almost exhausted form of his sweetheart by his strong right arm and pointing with his left forefinger toward a small cabin set against a rocky steep. "Not much of a place fer looks, but it'll try the mettle of the rascals to git into it. They can't do it on'y by the front way, and if they try that on—"

He closed the sentence with a suggestive look, and ran on again, as another yell told him the Utes were coming on at a speed that was becoming alarming.

His companions raced at his side, upheld and spurred by that promise of refuge, and after a short run the little cabin was reached and entered.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE STROKE OF THE THUNDERBOLT.

WHETHER or not the Utes suspected that a trap had been set for them, may not be known, but certain it is that they kept well out of sight for a long time after the fleeing party had gained the shelter of the cabin.

Seebring had anticipated doing a good deal of work at that point, and had therefore laid in a stock of provisions so that they now had no fear of being starved into submission and surrender. There was also water in abundance to be had from a spring that issued from beneath a rock only a few yards away.

To provide against an emergency, they filled the canteen from this spring, and likewise the small bucket that Seebring had brought to the house.

Thus fortified, they felt able to resist a siege of considerable length.

In addition, there was a large quantity of gunpowder, of the coarse mining variety, that Seebring had laid in for rock-splitting purposes.

He said little about this, though, pleased as he was to find it still there and uninjured. But he took Flotsam and Mark aside and communicated to them his intentions concerning it, and secured their assistance in what he conceived to be a brilliant scheme for defense and offense.

A quantity of the powder was poured into a rock cavity in front of the cabin and about a hundred yards from it. This was tamped in securely, and a fuse laid to the house.

"If the beggars crowd us, we'll blow them across the lake!" he grimly declared, as he finished these preparations.

Flotsam had assumed the duty of mounting to the crest of the nearest ridge and from there observing the movements of the Utes.

They were, he believed, waiting for the coming of a greater number, for he could see other boats out in the lake, and signal-fires had been lighted on some of the hilts.

"They're as big a lot o' cowards as I ever looked on!" he growled, as he observed these things. "They won't fight unless they think they've got everything their own way, and even then they're not likely to be any too fresh about it. But I'm powerful glad they're takin' things easy; yes! glad for the sake of the girls!"

He descended with his report, and found that Sam Seebring was in the best of spirits, and seemingly pining for the Utes to advance to the attack.

"Don't waste yer fat a-frettin' about their pokyness, Samyul!" he advised, in that queer dialect he sometimes assumed, and which, when he used it, seemed his ordinary and accustomed speech. "Don't waste yer fat a-frettin'! I opinc they'll be along soon enough! Too soon, mebbe! For myself, I shouldn't keer if they d hold off and give me about four days' sleep. I'd feei more like fightin' after it!"

There was much wisdom in the quaint admonition a thing Seebring was not slow to appreciate.

However, Seebring's apparent desire that the Utes should advance to the onslaught seemed destined to be speedily gratified, for shortly after a number of them were seen creeping stealthily toward the cabin. They were too cautious to expose their precious persons to the shots from Sam's revolver or the rain of fiery rockets.

Under shelter of a mass of volcanic rock, within easy shooting distance, they fired an occasional bullet or arrow, and were evidently hoping that some ill-advised movement within the house would expose its occupants to their fire.

Other Utes posted themselves in similar places, until the cabin on that side was encompassed by a semi-circular line of Indian sharp-shooters.

The inmates of the cabin knew, also, quite as well as if their eyes had seen it, that other savages were creeping along the rocky plateau, in an effort to effect a surprise and descent over the bluffs.

But Seebring had taken such a sieve into consideration in building the shanty, and had set it so that an overhanging shelf precluded the success of such a movement. Even if the Utes rolled down stones from the cliff, these would fall harmlessly beyond the roof into what, had the plat been fenced, might have been termed the front yard.

Seebring was the best shot among the small garrison, and he posted himself near the small window and occasionally answered with the revolver the shots of the Utes. It is to be doubted if these efforts were at all effective, but they served to hold the Utes at a respectful distance and impress on them the alertness of their foes.

The chief efforts of the Indians were directed at the door and window, and the excellence of savage marksmanship was attested by an arrow that now and then whizzed into the cabin and struck quivering in the rear wall. Some of the bullets also found entrance there, and not a few penetrated the timbers of the door.

Hence, it was necessary to be constantly on the alert, and to keep well out of the way of these exposed places.

After an hour or two of this desultory firing, the door assumed the appearance of a porcupine and fairly bristled with feathery tips.

The frightened girls, unused to such dreadful scenes as they had lately been called on to pass through, shrank shivering in a safe corner, and listened with sinking hearts to the patter of ball and arrow. It came like the slow dropping of rain from a summer shower, swelling and increasing at times into an angry dash.

But they were grateful for the fact that so far not one of the members of the little party had been touched, great as seemed the constant danger.

Suddenly, to the intense astonishment of Seebring who stood guarding the window, a dark form shot from the cliff overhead into the yard scarcely a pace from the door.

He instantly threw up his weapon for the purpose of firing, but the agile Ute rolled, or rather writhed, under the protecting wall of the house, and was safe.

"That beats my time!" Seebring ejaculated, scarcely able to conceal his alarm and agitation from the young women.

Then he beckoned Flotsam to his side and informed him of what he had seen.

None of the others had observed the leap of the Ute, and so slight was the sound made when the Indian struck the ground, owing to the elastic and cushiony contact of his moccasined feet, that his close and dangerous proximity was unknown to all save Seebring.

In a few whispered words, Seebring made the Wizard Detective acquainted with the nature of the peril.

"He'll probably try to fire the cabin!" were Seebring's ominous words.

All this was immediately proven by the shooting downward of a quantity of dry sage brush and weeds.

These fell so far out, though, that the Ute crouching under cabin wall feared to try to secure them.

Another bunch of the same material fell; this time closer in.

The waiting Ute leaped forward for the purpose of dragging it back to the security of his position, but Seebring threw up his revolver with lightning-like rapidity and fired.

The shot took effect; and, with a howl, the Ute dropped the bundle of fagots and sprung blindly for a protecting cavity in the ledgy wall that extended out toward the plain.

Seebring fired again, as the savage leaped across the field of vision clasping a wounded arm, but the bullet missed its aim, and the Ute gained the cavity.

"He'll not get out o' there in a hurry, I'm thinkin'!" and Seebring indulged in a gratified chuckle, in which he was joined by the detective.

The wounded Indian was truly cooped up in a very undesirable place. Only by crowding back into the hole and remaining there could he feel safe for a moment. The opening into the rock was plainly visible from the window and within easy shot.

"Likely it will teach them a lesson!"

Mark observed, for the shots and exclamations of his friends had drawn him too to the window.

The words had scarcely left his lips, when a flight of arrows and bullets whizzed through the window in dangerous proximity to the heads of the speakers, causing them to draw back in unfeigned alarm.

Of course an explanation had to be vouchsafed to the girls, who were not much reassured by the knowledge that the Ute had been driven into a crevice where he would be forced to remain until the coming of darkness made it safe for him to crawl away.

If one Ute had been daring enough to drop from the cliff into the yard, others might be equally as daring.

And this view of the ease was soon shown to be true: for the rattling hail of the arrows had barely ceased when another dark form dropped downward as if shot from the sky; and succeeded, as the first had done, in gaining the shelter of the wall, in spite of Seebring's efforts to wing him.

Worse than that: he had fearlessly snatched up some of the inflammable material and borne it under shadow of the wall with him.

Seebring was manifestly much disturbed by this untoward circumstance, and endeavored vainly to dislodge the crafty rascal by firing through the boards of the wall at the point where the Ute was supposed to be crouching.

"I'll fetch him!" Flotsam declared, compressing his thin lips, and diving into the pocket where he had stored the remainder of the material used in the manufacture of the rockets. "He'll think the sky has gone to belchin' fire, in about two seconds!"

He tore a strip of an old bed-covering, which Sam had piled into a corner for his cot, and into this dropped the queer-looking powder. Then he sprinkled the powder with a little water taken from the bucket, and ignited the cloth by touching it to a burning match.

The whole instantly sprung into a mass of flame that towered and roared spitefully, and threw out sparks like a revolving pinwheel.

Regardless of the personal danger to which the act exposed him the Wizard Detective rushed near to the window and hurled the mass of flame through it and toward the point occupied by the crouching Ute.

A yell of astonishment and fear arose instantaneously, and the savage, with hair and clothing on fire, dashed out of his concealment and shot like a blazing meteor down the strip of ground in front of the cabin.

The Wizard Detective's hands had not escaped a severe scorching, and it was plainly evident the Ute would be severely burned, if he were not already. And it was perhaps this reflection that kept Sam Seebring from shooting him as he ran down the slope.

"There'll be one Ute that'll not try that house-burning game any more!" Flotsam declared, with grim satisfaction. "He's had enough fire fer one little time, I'm thinkin'!"

A heavy volume of smoke was ascending, showing that the fire was still flaming away at the side of the house, and soon an ominous crackling showed it had communicated to the dry sage brush borne there by the Ute.

This was a matter calling for immediate attention; and once more Flotsam advanced to the window. This time he carried the water bucket, and he sacrificed its contents by hurling them on the fire.

A perfect rain of arrows flew about him as he accomplished this daring feat, and he came back from the window with a number of feathered shafts sticking in his coat, and a bullet-hole in his cap; but he came back uninjured, and he had subdued the fire.

"'Twas a little risky!" he said, in reply to Jessie Burnaby's protest. "But it had to be done; and when a thing's got to be done, the less fuss that's made in doin' it the better. That's my idee!"

Though he put aside her words so lightly, yet it was clear that the protest pleased him, showing as it did a solicitous regard for his welfare.

None of the Utes cared to undertake the firing of the cabin after the dreadful experience of those who had already made the attempt, and so the slow hours wore away

without further demonstrations on the part of the besiegers.

As the sun declined in the west, Sam Seebring joyfully announced the appearance of some low-lying, black clouds.

"It's been a powerful hot day, as you've noticed," he reminded, "an' I've been lookin' an' hopin' fer that! We'll have a bu'stin' big storm in less'n an hour, if I'm not missin' my guess. We've got to get out o' hyer tonight; fer Flotsam used up about all our water, and water we've got to have!"

His idea did not seem to be to make a dash for liberty.

He had talked over the situation with the detective and Mark at intervals throughout the day. There was a considerable Mormon settlement not many miles distant, and he thought they ought to try to gain its shelter that night.

This was probably the settlement the Utes were contemplating a movement against; and the party in the cabin, could they but reach it, would not only gain a haven of safety but would thus be able to warn the settlers.

The black clouds rose rapidly out of the lake and came across the water, low hanging and threatening, bearing every indication of an approaching tempest. The sun sunk to rest in a sea of fiery haze; the winds arose and blew the alkaline dust in blinding, leaping eddies across the plains; and the blasted sage and scrubby growths on the tops of the bleak volcanic rocks tilted and nodded moaning.

All the while Sam Seebring watched these portents with a kindling eye, and walked restlessly about, stepping to the window every few moments in spite of the peril from Ute arrows.

As the sun disappeared the cabin shook beneath the rush of a terrific wind, a blaze of lightning leaped out of the heart of the black cloud, the thunder pealed with startling distinctness, and the desert storm was upon them with an appalling roar and din.

Again the lightning blazed, and by its light Seebring saw the Ute who had been so long compelled to lie hidden in the cavity, scudding for the open country as if all the terrors of earth and sky had suddenly loosed on him.

Then the wall of blackness came down, and naught could be discerned by the eye, though to the ear the howling of the storm seemed to take on ten-fold fury.

Once more the lightning blazed and the thunder crashed, and Seebring, facing the tempest from the window, saw the Utes in line across the opening leading toward the cabin, apparently ready to rush to the destruction of the little band of whites.

It was the movement he had so long anticipated and for which he had so closely watched. It was the fearful moment for which he had hoped with an intensity that was almost despairing.

Instantly a match blazed in his shaking fingers, and a snaky coil of fire shot out from the cabin scarcely a second later. He had lighted the trail of blasting-powder that led to the mine he had prepared that morning.

The upleaping glare and the explosion that followed was something sublimely terrible. It drowned the roar of the storm and the shock of the thunder and paled the lightning's brilliant fire. The earth seemed uprooted and in the throes of dissolution, and all nature seemed momentarily swallowed in an all enveloping, angry conflagration.

The cabin appeared toppling from its foundations, and great stones were heard to crash downward through the gloom.

"Now is our time!" Seebring shouted, finding it necessary to pitch his voice to a shriek to make himself heard. "Now is our time! Don't lose a moment! Follow me!"

His hand was on the door, whose fastenings he had previously unloosed.

He clasped Mary Walden about the waist, as if he would uplift and bear her in his arms to a place of safety, and thus he leaped through the doorway, closely followed by Mark and Jessie, the Wizard Detective bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HAVEN OF REST.

SAM SEEBRING stood behind a thick mud parapet in the little Mormon town of Nephi, in the valley of Jordan. The mud parapet

was pierced for rifles; and through one of the holes Seebring peered out over the gray plain at a group of yelling Indians, who were making the air vocal on the crest of a ridge that was sufficiently removed to give them a sense of security.

In the town of Nephi the fugitives had found a haven of rest; though they had not won it without much toil, many privations, and perils innumerable and constant.

On hurrying away from the cabin, after the terrific explosion, they were unable to determine the extent of the havoc wrought. They only knew that great stones had been removed out of their places, that a ragged rent showed in the wall at the point where the powder charge had been deposited, and that not a Ute was anywhere visible to interfere with their retreat.

Whether or not any of the savages had been slain, they had no ready means of ascertaining. But there was one thing certain: The unexpected upheaval, with its deafening detonation, its glare of scorching flame, and its rain of rent bowlers, had thrown the Utes into a panic and driven them from the field.

With as little noise as was possible, Seebring led the party from the vicinity and guided them through the darkness across the intervening volcanic hills.

The dawn found them on the edge of the Jordan valley, surrounded by the familiar sage-brush and volcanic scoria, with the fortified town of Nephi in the distance.

The people of Nephi—all of them Mormon settlers—had been called on more than once to resist the invasions of the Indians, whom, after their peculiar fashion, they designated as "Lamanites." Consequently, they had inclosed the town with strong mud fortifications; and there were lesser defenses, with parapets pierced for rifles, near many of the houses.

It was near one of these that Seebring stood; and behind him rose the house these parapets were meant to shelter, and within which the Wizard Detective, Mark Lanyard, and the young women were at that moment resting from the fatigues of their flight.

It was the home of the traveling elder, Cornelius Sunderland, to which they had been given a warm welcome by that pure-minded and kind-hearted gentleman.

"The wild Lamanites of the hills seem unusually fierce this evening."

It was Sunderland who spoke. He had approached Seebring unobserved, and now applied an eye to one of the loop-holes, and looked out at the howling Utes.

The sun was sinking in a blaze of glory to its home in the Great Salt Lake, lighting up the grayish, somber landscape with a rare radiance.

"I reckon they're p'izen mad because we give 'em the slip so easy!" Seebring observed, squinting in the same direction.

"It's not wholly that," said Sunderland, with an air of knowledge. "I've been over the country a good deal lately, and the Lamanites have everywhere been restless. I think I know the reason, too. It's the work of your friend, the Duke of Deseret!"

Seebring gave him an inquiring look.

"Don't think that I mean to say your party is responsible for the trouble; but at the same time I'm absolutely sure that the Duke of Deseret has instigated a general uprising among the Lamanites for the purpose of hiding his designs against you and your friends. He feels that, should you fall victims to the fury of the Lamanites who have been pursuing you, the thing cannot be charged against him."

The scheme of the duke, thus revealed, was so reasonable, and so in accord with what Seebring knew of the man's character, that he could not doubt that Sunderland had hit on the true solution of the sudden turmoil among the Indians.

"Do you think the Utes will be likely to attack us to-night?" and Seebring peered out again.

"If they feel themselves strong enough! We must be ever watchful."

While this conversation was being held near the parapeted wall, the Wizard Detective had drawn near to Jessie Burnaby, and was eying her in the strange manner that had recently become so marked.

As it chanced, they were alone in one of the small rooms of the rambling abode,

"I don't want you to be frightened at what I'm about to reveal to you!"

He had dropped entirely the peculiar dialect he often assumed, and spoke as becomes an educated man and a gentleman.

She returned his look with manifest interest, while her color perceptibly heightened.

"Is it likely that I shall be easily frightened at anything, after the terrible experiences we have just passed through?"

He smiled in a manner meant to be pleasant.

"Well, then, I think I know you and your history a great deal better than you do yourself. In fact, I think—I'm certain—that *I'm your father!*"

Jessie's heaving bosom revealed the force of the shock so suddenly communicated, and her eyes took on a longing light, that yet showed much inward questioning.

"Surely, it cannot be true!" she gasped.

"Why, your name is—"

"It never *was* Flotsam, any more than yours is Burnaby. It is Falconberg; Thomas Falconberg, and your name, your true name, is Jeannette Falconberg!"

She was becoming red and white by turns, and had arisen tremblingly; plainly showing an inclination to rush to him and welcome him as the father she had long believed dead.

At this, the glow of an ineffable happiness came to his thin, worn face, and with a bound he reached her side and clasped her in a fatherly embrace.

He pressed a kiss on her upturned face; and just then, the door connecting the adjoining room was opened, and Mark Lanyard stood in the doorway, a bewildered witness of the scene.

"It's all right!" Flotsam declared, drawing back involuntarily, the thrill of deep feeling in his voice. "I'm not trying to steal your sweetheart from you. But if you'll allow me, I'll introduce to you my daughter, Jeannette Falconberg! I discovered her some time ago; but she's just discovered me."

The young man's astonishment was naturally quite as great as the girl's had been; and questions, ejaculations, and explanations, crowded thick and fast.

Mary Walden was summoned to hear the singular story, and Seebring was called in from his post at the wall for the same purpose.

It was a long story that Fergus Flotsam had to tell, and the telling of it consumed the greater part of the evening, interrupted as it was by the occasional alarms from the guards on duty.

To detail it here would require too much space; and only the outline will be given:

Thomas Falconberg, or Fergus Flotsam, as he has been known to the reader, had been an Englishman of considerable wealth and standing, and a resident of London. As a gay young man of the English metropolis, he had fallen in love with and married a well-known opera singer, at that time the queen of the London stage.

A little more than a year later, twin daughters were born to them; the mother giving up her life in the birth of these children.

The death of the wife drove the young husband into frenzied despair, and he sought forgetfulness by journeys into far countries.

Word reached England of his death from fever in the jungles of India.

He had left the children in charge of an elderly maiden aunt; and, as soon as his death became noised abroad, a brother put in an appearance, claiming the estate and the care of the children.

It was strongly suspected at the time that the kinship was only pretense, for the brother who came forward thus opportunely had not been seen in London for so long that all trace of him had become lost.

He established himself, nevertheless, in the Falconberg home, where he lived in magnificent style until the death of the aunt, which occurred soon after. Then he sold the property, and with the children and the cash obtained from the sale, disappeared.

However, Thomas Falconberg was not dead, and the evidence he afterward accumulated served to show that the story of

his death from jungle fever had been started by the pretended brother, who aimed to profit by it; and this pretended brother was the man who has figured in these pages as the Duke of Deseret.

Falconberg did not return from the Indian jungles for many years; and during these he wandered far and wide in that strange Oriental land, becoming almost as one of the natives. The wonderful art of the Indian jugglers attracted him, and he made himself as much a master of it as any European can ever hope to become. It was chiefly there that he learned the many magical tricks he had since performed so successfully, supplementing this knowledge by a thorough study of the methods of all modern famous presti-giators, so that he became specially adept in all feats of legerdemain.

Letters came to Falconberg from London with unbroken regularity, assuring him that his affairs in England were moving along in a satisfactory manner. These letters, which were professedly written by an old acquaintance, he afterward knew to have been forgeries; though this knowledge did not come to him until his return to England.

His amazement as well as his anger was unbounded, when he found his daughters gone, the aunt dead, and his estate in the hands of strangers. He gave up his life to a search for the author of his undoing; and it was only after many fruitless efforts that he gained the clue which pointed to the shores of the great Dead Sea of America.

It was then that the letter writer, who, unknown to him, had constantly watched his movements, sent to the Duke of Deseret the warning that Nemesis was on the latter's trail.

His knowledge of magic and his love of the stage drew him to the theater on his arrival in the City of Saints, where the resemblance of Jessie Burnaby to his dead wife strongly attracted him. He suspected the truth even then, but could not be sure of it for lack of proof, and because Jessie had herself no knowledge that she was of English birth and parentage.

Not until Falconberg's return to the ducal palace from the mine, did he feel absolutely sure that the girl was his daughter. There he had found a piece of a letter written by Major Mix to his son Marcus. It was in the nature of a confession, going somewhat into details, and had undoubtedly been penned before the making of the oral confession in the secret room of the mine which had been heard by Sam Seebring. This confession forever set the matter at rest in the mind of the anxious father.

The exciting events which immediately followed the finding of this letter had caused the Wizard Detective to postpone from time to time the revelation he so much desired to make; but now that all were safe within the town of Nephi, he ventured to reveal himself to Jessie, and to open his heart to these friends.

"I shall never rest until this false Duke of Deseret has suffered for his crimes!" was his stern conclusion. "He is a murderer as well as an adventurer and thief. I know, now, that your dear aunt, the kind-hearted woman in whose care I left you and your sister, was brought to the grave through poison administered by the hand of this man."

There was much discussion as to what had become of the sister, but every trace of her seemed lost, and they could only conjecture concerning her fate.

What with the excitement attending these disclosures, and the threatenings of the Utes, there was small desire for sleep that night. But it was a happy night, for all that; a night filled to the brim with triumphant and pleasurable emotions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HAND OF POWER.

WITHIN his private office, behind its high excluding cobblestone wall, the great head of the Mormon Church tramped restlessly up and down. The sounds of the craftsmen at work on the temple building, whose towers rose ever higher and higher, had no power to soothe him.

Brigham Young was a lion when roused; and now his blue eyes blazed with a wrath that was terrible.

Mr. Lanyard, Mark's father, had just departed from the office, and some revelations which Lanyard had made were the cause of the present outburst of anger.

Mr. Lanyard had finally risen superior to his fears, and no longer taking counsel of these, had gone to the President of the Church with a somewhat remarkable story. He had been driven to do this by his intense desire to aid his son and his son's friends, as well as by a desire to do what his own heart told him to be right.

The story of his indebtedness to Major Mix, of the lash which Mix held over him because of the Danite incident, and of the many influences that Mix had brought to bear to bend him to his will, was not a pleasant confession.

Unpleasant as it was, however, it might not have stirred Young to action. At any rate, the great man did not become thoroughly aroused until informed of the deeds Mix had done under the professed sanction of the Church, and to its disgrace and discredit. That awoke all the lion in his soul. Where the Church was concerned he was jealously awake, and watchful of its every interest. Mix had traded on the influence he held with prominent churchmen; and had set in motion schemes innumerable which must have fallen flat but for the backing he was thus able to give them. And these schemes were for the most part of a character to injure the reputation of the Church, weaken its hold on its membership, and bring it into disrepute with the outer world.

"There was a tap on the office door, and Young turned toward it with a scowl; his face clearing when he saw who the intruder was.

"Ah! it's you, Marlin! I sent for you; but didn't think you could get here so soon. You are promptness itself. Take fifty men and go at once to the so-called ducal palace, in the mountains on the east of the lake, and bring hither one Major Mix, who styles himself the Duke of Deseret. Bring him bound, and show him no consideration whatever."

The man, brawny of frame and with a stern, strong face, was turning away, when Young called him back:

"The Lamanites are rising again; and I'm assured it is through the influence of this Major Mix. Send a hundred good men to the relief of Nephi. I hear they have come up against it, even as the Philistines of old did against the cities of Canaan! And may the Lord be with you!"

"May the Lord be with you!" the man repeated; and then seeing that no further orders were to be given, drew the office door after him and walked quickly away.

Within an hour afterward one hundred armed men were hastening toward Nephi, and Marlin, with fifty more, was striking into the desert on his way to the home of the duke.

As it chanced, Major Mix had been in the city at the moment of Lanyard's visit to the office of Young, and one of his faithful adherents, ever watchful of his interests, had crept stealthily after Lanyard and heard in part the revelation.

He hurried with this to Mix, even before Lanyard came out of the office.

Mix's visit to the city had been for the furtherance of another plan against Flotsam and the latter's associates, should they escape from the Utes, as he feared they might. And one of the men on whom he expected to call was none other than the elder Lanyard.

A deathly pallor overspread his puffy face when his faithful spy made him acquainted with the object of Lanyard's trip to Young's office. He not only saw that the game was up, but that he must look out for his own safety.

"Curses on that fool, Lanyard!" he growled, rising hurriedly, his rotund form aquiver with alarmed agitation. "Perhaps he thinks he's done with me. I'll take pleasure in showing him his mistake!"

He felt pretty sure a warrant for his arrest would be immediately issued, for observation had shown him that Young usually moved with lightning celerity when induced to move at all.

"The chances are ten to one that he'll think me in town!" he muttered, as he left the building, for he did not doubt that his coming had been made known.

He mounted his fast horse, which he had

hitched near, and was soon making his way out of the place.

The pallor had not left his face, and it was not decreased when he was halted on a side street by a man who ran up to him, panting from his exertions.

It was another of the many spies he had for some time kept employed.

"I've just learned that Marlin's been ordered to arrest you!" the fellow whispered, clinging to Mix's stirrup-leather and looking up with a face quite as white and startled. "You'd better get out of here as quick as you can."

All thoughts of retaliating on Lanyard faded instantly from Mix's mind. His only regard was for his own personal security.

"Thank you!" he said, his tones shaky with terror.

Then he struck spurs into the horse and galloped rapidly out into the plain.

He saw that he must leave the country at once, or suffer the consequences. What these might be he dreaded to think. His long course of villainy rose back of him like a threatening wall. At that moment he feared Flotsam as he had never feared him before. Flotsam alone had been a dreaded Nemesis; but with the power of the Church arrayed on Flotsam's side, he was ten times more formidable.

He had a large amount of portable wealth stored at the palace.

"I'll secure that," he thought, "and then I'll get out of the country!"

All his visions of power and wealth were fading from him; and, as the horse leaped forward with its easy, space-devouring strides, he began to plan the line of his contemplated flight through the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SMITTEN BY THEIR OWN WEAPONS.

The start thus gained by the Duke of Deseret served him well. Not once did the pursuing party under Marlin come in sight of him. The horse ridden by the duke was not only speedy, but it was capable of long-distance exertions.

It was with a feeling of triumph that the fear-impelled man rode round the rocky angle that had for some time shut out the forward view, and looked once more into the familiar valley that held the gardens and the towering domes and walls of the great house whose ownership and erection had given him such pride.

But the triumph held within its depths a pang keen as a knife-stab. Not even those glittering walls could longer shelter and shield him. The power and influence with which he had fancied himself clothed had faded, or was fading. Only a few days before, the greatest in Deseret's capital were pleased to do him homage. He could not look to them for aid now; and he knew that as soon as this last bit of news became generally known, there would be none in the city so low as to give him a passing word of sympathy.

He had played for big stakes, and had lost. He had flown high; and now the very elevation he had attained made the descent more bitter. But he was not a man to nurse regrets. He had the happy faculty of being able to put the past behind him, and to look toward the future.

He smiled oddly, as one of the blacks came hurrying out to take his horse. He reflected that at least these people were faithful; though he could not help wondering if they would be could they know all.

He hurried to the room in which were stored his valuable papers and the portable wealth he had from time to time accumulated against this day of defeat.

Many of these papers were locked up in an antiquated trunk; and as the key was missing, he was compelled to force the lid in order to get at them.

This occupied much precious time, and more was consumed in a search for the documents he desired to take with him.

He visited the window overlooking the plain, at intervals, to ascertain if Marlin's men were yet in sight; and once he went down into the hall and gave instructions to a black to get two of the best saddle-horses

in readiness, with an abundance of provisions and water for a long journey.

Although the duke did not know it, this order was not carried out, owing to a startling occurrence which set the minds of the blacks in a tumultuous whirl.

This occurrence was the coming of a black runner from the force which had joined the Utes in the siege of Nephi; and so startling was the story he had to tell, that its effect on the negroes at the palace was little short of terrible.

Immediately on hearing it, Prince George vanished from among his associates; appearing soon after before the astonished Mix in the room above.

It was not the coming of Prince George, itself, that startled Mix out of thoughts of his teeming plans, but the look of settled and deadly hate that rested on Prince George's ebony face. So fierce a look Mix had never seen there; and, as if to add to the threat of it, two huge rattlesnakes coiled about the neck of the negro, their beady black eyes seemingly fixed on the master of the house, and their tongues darting in and out horribly.

Mix had just paid a visit to the window; and, seeing no trace of the dreaded pursuers, had returned feverishly to his task of sorting the papers.

He had not observed the coming of the black runner; but, even if he had been aware of it, he would have been at as great a loss to account for Prince George's changed demeanor.

Heretofore the serpent-charming voodooist had been one of the most servile of men, bending and fawning at his master's slightest wish. Now he stood erect, his black eyes flashing with an inward rage, and his ugly features contorted by a spell of fury.

The room was in confusion, with chairs overturned and papers scattered here and there; and Mix was bending over the trunk, in whose depths his hands were delving.

"W'at yo' mean by dis here foolishness?" Prince George demanded.

His words held the combined hiss of a serpent and the snarl of a tiger.

Mix arose startledly. He saw that trouble was brewing.

"By what?" he asked, striving to appear calm.

"Yo' goin' to leave us here! Why for? Why yo' run away from us, now, when we need yo'?"

"I'm not going to leave you," Mix prevaricated.

"W'at 'bout them hosses yo' order, suh? W'at 'bout them? W'at 'bout them p'visions, and water?"

His manner grew more menacing; and to Mix's excited fancy the snakes' glittering eyes became more baleful. A low, angry "whirr" also sounded.

This last was probably occasioned by the shifting movement of the voodooist, but for all that, it sent a thrill to the very marrow of the quaking and perturbed white man.

"I was just going into the hills on a little pleasure trip!"

"Yo' lie! Yo' lie!" Prince George screamed, losing all control of himself, and leaping toward Mix with a tigerish bound. "Yo' think to leave us! But yo' shall not! Yo' die right here!"

He drew a long knife and lunged with it at his master.

But for those writhing rattlesnakes, Mix would instantly have closed with him, feeling that that was his best show. But the snakes held him back. No doubt Prince George had counted on this, and thus had been induced to bring them.

However, Mix sprung quickly aside, exhibiting great lightness and dexterity for a man of his build, and, picking up a chair, struck full at the head of the angry negro. Prince George got his head out of the way of the descending blow, but the chair fell heavily on his shoulders, knocking one of the rattlesnakes to the floor.

There it coiled itself in hideous fashion, and sounded its warning rattle; being joined in this musical outburst by its venomous mate, still coiled about the neck of Prince George.

The negro caught the chair and hurled it aside, and again rushed on Mix with the uplifted knife.

Mix avoided this as he had avoided the

first, and, striking out boldly, succeeded in planting a blow that knocked the black over backward to the floor.

Most unfortunately for the negro, he fell sprawling against the coiled rattler, which immediately sunk its poisonous fangs into his arm.

He sprung up, wild-eyed and panting, shook the snake off with a mad howl, and again charged Mix with all the fury of a demon.

This time Mix was not so successful in eluding the onset. The glittering knife descended, eating its way through the muscles of the neck; and as Mix fell beneath the hellish stroke, the knife glittered again and again.

Then Prince George cast the body from him; for the last blow had severed the cord of life, and the Duke of Deseret was but a lump of senseless clay.

Not satisfied with this, the negro picked up the still rattling snakes—for both were on the floor—and deposited them on the lifeless body, stirring them up until they struck their fangs again and again into the dead flesh.

His bitten arm was swelling, and ominous pains began to shoot from it to the shoulder and into the neck. A sense of terror shook him and gave to his black face a dirty, grayish hue. He tried to get the wound to his mouth, hoping to suck out the poison. He found himself unable to do this, and the look of fear increased.

With amazing nerve, he coolly wiped the knife of its blood-stains, and with a quick circular incision cut out the flesh about the wound. The blood streamed forth profusely, a fact he seemed to view with delight.

"Let out snake bite, maybe!" he muttered, smacking his dry lips.

But the blood flowed so freely that he saw it would soon become necessary to stanch it.

He was feeling sick and giddy, and those dreaded shooting pains had not disappeared. The swelling seemed to be increasing, and the pains growing more marked.

He had not thought of being bitten himself, for his power over every serpent was indeed wonderful; and there is small likelihood that he would have been, had he not fallen backward against the rattler.

He usually went prepared with remedies and antidotes; and, having none with him, hurried away to apply them; the looks of fear on his face constantly deepening.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RESULT OF A BIT OF RECKLESSNESS.

As the reader has more than once observed, there was a decided tendency to recklessness in the mental make up of Mark Lanyard. Times without number it had turned his feet into the path of peril. The chase of the carriage through the streets out into the desert, which brought him to the point of starvation, will be readily recalled as an instance.

But it is doubtful if, in all his life, he had ever been guilty of so reckless a thing, as that which he was now doing.

Like a sprawling, giant lizard, or an inky shadow, he lay out on the sloping ground beyond the defenses of Nephi, straining his ears to catch any sound that might come from the direction of the encompassing Utes.

No sounds came, and he hitched along, half uplifting himself on his elbows;—then again halted to listen.

Throughout the long hours of that afternoon there had been no indications of the presence of enemies anywhere in the vicinity of the little Mormon town.

Mark, studying this singular fact, had about reached the conclusion that the Utes, becoming discouraged by their lack of success, had abandoned the siege and departed.

Sunderland, however, when approached on the subject, declared they were still there, though invisible; and Seebring and the Wizard King Detective agreed with him in this view.

But Mark Lanyard remained unsatisfied. He did not think the Utes would remain thus quiet. It was not in accordance with what he had observed of their actions; and if they were gone he wanted to know it.

He was burning with impatience to proceed to Salt Lake City. He felt that, even though friends were kind here, this was not

the place for the woman he loved. He desired to place her beyond reach of all harm from the fiendish Utes; and, grown strong with the love that filled him, he had resolved to take her direct to his father's house, and crave for her there the protection needed.

"I do believe the villains have left!" he muttered, after hearkening for a long time, without the reward of a single sound. "Oh if they only have! Then we can go on our way without further trouble."

Having thus soliloquized, he again hitched forward.

There were here and there some sprawling patches of sage brush, of the giant variety that grows frequently in that region. It was six and eight feet high in places, and served admirably as a screen, aided by the gloom. The Utes had found it of frequent service in their advances and attempts on the town.

Lanyard utilized these growths for his present purpose, and wormed his way through and under them with all the stealthy silence of a creeping panther.

The ascent of the small hill was made; and, when its crest had been gained, he once more stopped.

He felt sure if there were any Indians in the vicinity he would be able to discover them now, even though they had been invisible from the Nephi ramparts. He half expected to discern somewhere on the lower levels the smoldering glow of camp-fires. But nothing of the kind did he see. It really began to seem that he was right in conjecturing that the Utes had become discouraged and had departed.

None of his friends within the beleaguered town knew of his presence on the slope at that untimely hour. If they had known of his intention, doubtless they would have dissuaded him with argument, backed, if necessary, by force.

Resting here, he glanced toward the buildings he had left behind him. They were dimly outlined as masses of black against the background of the night. From a few windows, lights shone dimly, revealing the wakefulness of the watchers and the guards.

He tried to fix his eyes on the building that held within its heart the woman for whom he lived, and for whom he felt he would even be willing to die. But the gloom baffled him. He could not single it out from the other shadowy outlines of houses.

He was about to turn his eyes again to the lower slopes, which appeared so deserted, and had partially uplifted himself on his elbows with the intention of again moving on, when he felt himself seized in a strong embrace, and clasped by hands that had the strength of iron. His elbows were drawn back; and a foot, placed crushingly against his neck, pinned him to the earth. He could scarcely move; and as for any effort at resistance, such was well-nigh useless.

Then he heard a guttural exclamation of satisfaction; and a bunch of wiry fingers took him by the throat with choking violence.

Not one, but two, and perhaps more, of the Indians he had been telling himself were gone, held him; and a sense of how foolishly and almost criminally heedless he had been smote him like a knife-stab. But it was too late for regrets. Against the opinions of friends, and those older and more experienced, he had persisted in his belief; and this was the result.

A faint, gurgling cry escaped his lips, but it had not sufficient volume to penetrate to the sentinels on duty at the defenses; and, even if it had been borne to them, they could not have rendered him immediate aid, because of the peril to which they would have exposed themselves.

A smothering deerskin was thrown over Mark's head, and then he felt binding and hastily twisted thongs cut into the flesh of his arms and legs.

He groaned, for his despair was heart-rending. He foresaw, instead of the speedy return to Salt Lake City, for himself a horrible death. And just then, of all times, he most wanted to live.

With a carelessness for the pain it caused him, the Utes dragged him down the slope, pulling him along on the rough ground with as little regard as if he had been only a log of wood.

There were now many murmuring voices about, and he knew that a large number of Indians had been near to assist those who went forward to capture him, if it had been made necessary.

This told him, too, that he had been seen for some time; probably from the moment he left the walls.

He had been able to steal by his friends, but he had not been able to evade the scrutiny of these lynx-eyed foes.

The Utes had been taking every precaution to prevent word being sent to the city; and they now believed they had in their possession one who had been daring enough to make the attempt to leave Nephi for the purpose of bringing assistance.

Hence, their joy was great, as they drew the unfortunate young man down the slope; and their intentions concerning him were of the most terrible description.

It did not take long for Mark to become acquainted with their aims.

He had no sooner been dragged to the foot of the slope and into the midst of a band of excited warriors and chiefs, than the smothering deerskin was taken from his head, and he was set on his feet in the center of a hastily-called council.

"What shall be done with this dog of a white man? This snake that slides through the night? This rattlesnake that has removed his warning rattles, and would strike without making a sound?" demanded a harsh-voiced chief, whose tones held the essence of malignant hate. "What say you, chiefs and warriors of the Ute nation?"

Mark, unfamiliar with the language, did not understand the words, but there was no misunderstanding the bitterness with which they were spoken; and his heart leaped with fear.

Instantly there was a subdued clamor for his immediate death.

"Ay! he shall die!" declared the first. "He would sneak to the white men in the big city, and bring them down to slay and destroy us. You have well spoken. He shall die!"

It had no sooner been decreed that Mark Lanyard should suffer death for his temerity, than preparations were begun to carry the decree into execution; and the preparations were of a character to make Mark's flesh creep and each individual hair of his head to stand fearfully on end.

His death was to be by torture at the fire-stake; and not only that: the Utes, throwing their caution to the winds, decided they would sacrifice him on the crest of the ridge, in full view of the friends within the palisaded inclosures. Within view of friends, who could witness his agonies and hear his cries, but could do nothing to relieve or aid him.

Mark, bound so that he could barely move, and wholly unable to help himself, beheld the pleased warriors hurry away in search of the dead branches and roots of the sage that were so plentiful all about. Light fagots had been tossed on the smoldering fires, and by the flames thus rekindled, he could witness these acts.

He struggled to free himself but only mocking jeers greeted his unavailing efforts.

"Have you no hearts?" he screamed, his features distorted and his limbs writhing. "You would not treat a dog that way! Have you no pity?"

They but laughed at and spat on him, to show how they loathed him, and how disgusted they were at this show of weakness.

And then Mark, realizing that he was pleasing them only too well, essayed to restrain his dread and to meet his fate with stoical indifference.

But he was not a savage, schooled in stoicism; and the task he tried to set himself was beyond his power.

A great heap of fagots was piled on the crest of the hill; and in the center of the heap, a strong stake, cut from a mountain cedar, was planted. And when all was in readiness, Mark, still fighting and struggling, was led up the slope and bound to this torture-pole.

Such a yell as now arose from the circle of fierce braves has rarely polluted the night air. It was defiant, fear-inspiring, and victorious in its vibrant intonations. It was such a yell as can only come from savage

throats. Few men have ever heard it; and they only in situations like this.

That yell floated over the defenses and into the houses of Nephi, causing strong men to turn pale and tremble, and women and children to shrink back, with tearful eyes and blanching features. It reached the woman whom Mark loved, and filled her with a fear that is indescribable, even though she did not realize its meaning.

Then a brand was touched to the inflammable pile, the light flashed across the gloom, and the people of Nephi were permitted to behold the tragedy in all its terror.

Mark Lanyard's sweetheart, seeing that white face and writhing form—for these could now be discerned almost as plainly as if it has been noonday—uttered a gasping cry, and fell senseless. Perhaps it was better thus. Such a strain could not have been endured.

The agitation and the terror among the inhabitants of the town were fearful to contemplate. Half the people seemed suddenly to become mad with fierce rage.

There was only one thing that held them in check, and kept the more daring from rushing out to almost certain death. That was the knowledge that already a strong body of men had left the defenses, under the admirable guidance of the Wizard King Detective, and were now somewhere hid in the shadows along the slope.

This body of men had been hastily selected by the detective, when the low cries of the Utes made him aware something was wrong; and when a search failed to reveal Mark Lanyard, he shrewdly leaped to a knowledge of the truth.

All unknowing that this force was advancing on them at hurrying speed, and with their attention given wholly to the helpless prisoner and the walls of the town, the Utes leaped and howled out their fiendish delight, as they saw the flames leap up and reach out their fiery arms to take hold on the garments of their intended victim.

But their yells were drowned by a roar of rifles, and a ringing cheer, that sent a chill of dread to their inhuman hearts.

A dozen of them dropped dead on the slope, and the others, unable to rally from their surprise, beat a quick retreat.

Before they could recover from their surprise and gather for an attack, Mark Lanyard's bonds had been cut; and he was flying with his rescuers for the walls of Nephi.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"THE Lamanites are preparing for some further move!" Sunderland announced, with a show of uneasiness.

He was standing again behind the parapet with Sam Seebring, and they were looking out, as on that previous occasion, toward the howling Utes.

These Vandals of the desert had tried many ruses to gain possession of the town of Nephi, that they might massacre its inhabitants without too great loss to themselves. But the watchfulness of the city by the guards had thwarted every movement.

Twice the Utes had entered the streets of the city by surmounting the rude outer wall, but the rifles of the men behind the parapets surrounding the houses had driven them back.

It was of course not positively known within the town that this uprising of the "Lamanites" was due to the influence of the Duke of Deseret, though Sunderland had spread the theory as the most reasonable inference to be drawn from all the facts. One thing only was sure: and that was that the Utes were showing a vindictive ingenuity quite surpassing all their previous efforts.

A number of times showers of burning arrows had been shot on the roofs of the houses, in the hope of firing them, but the sod with which the roofs were covered prevented such a catastrophe.

Suddenly, even as Sunderland and Seebring looked, a great agitation became apparent in the ranks of the Indians. The watchers thought it a premonition of an attack; but as no attack came, the surmise seemed incorrect.

"Great hookey! I do believe they're fighting among themselves!" Seebring asserted,

exposing his person perilously to gain a better view. "I hope if they air, it'll turn out like the fight of the Kilkenny cats!"

It did indeed seem as if this were the case. A great commotion was stirring the Indians into a peculiar and unusual activity. Shouts and yells rent the air, and, at one or two points, what appeared to be struggling bands of men swayed back and forth.

As the sun was still near the zenith, the opportunity of witnessing the strange scene was of the best; but though the people within the beleaguered town studied it with interest, they could not make up their minds as to what it all meant.

However, light was soon to be thrown on it.

The Utes disappeared from view, the cries died out; and over a distant rise, from the direction of Salt Lake City, came a large force of armed men at a swinging gallop.

The sorely beset inhabitants of Nephi lifted up their voices in a universal shout, that was mingled with prayer and praise for this unexpected deliverance.

They had been unable to get word through the Indian lines to the distant city, and as the hours passed without relief being sent them, they had feared their sore strait was unknown.

Now the gates were thrown open, and they hurried forth with mad delight, running eagerly to meet the succoring party.

As the reader has guessed, it was the body of men, one hundred strong, which Young had hurried to the relief of Nephi.

As soon as the horsemen came up, a pursuit of the Utes was instituted.

Then the cause of the strange commotion among the Indians was made clear by the finding of a number of bodies of negroes slain by hatchet and knife.

In some unknown manner word had got out among the Utes that the Duke of Deseret, the man for whom they were fighting, was fleeing to the mountains, and that they were to be delivered up to the troops from Salt Lake. This so enraged their savage hearts—and they were all the more ready to believe it when they discovered the advance of the troops!—that they fell on the unfortunate blacks and slew them, and then raised the siege and retreated.

Only one of the blacks escaped; and it was he that bore the startling news to Prince George, the serpent-charmer.

Thomas Falconberg, who has figured in these pages as Flotsam, the Wizard Detective, hurried with quick and nervous strides up the wide path leading to Major Mix's ducal palace. Several men tramped sturdily at his heels, chief of whom were Sam Seebring and Mark Lanyard.

Falconberg was determined that Mix should not escape the just merit of his crimes; and therefore had hurried on for the purpose of arresting him in his flight, feeling sure that Mix would attempt to escape.

Falconberg's party had ridden rapidly, and so had overtaken and joined the command sent out from Salt Lake under Marlin; and this force was now posted in the ravines surrounding the house and grounds to intercept all who should try to break away.

Marlin himself was of the detective's party, and seemed quite as eager to lay violent hands on the dastardly duke.

The place bore a strangely silent appearance; and, as there were everywhere signs of confusion, Falconberg feared that, after all, he had arrived too late. The neighing of some horses from the big stable were the only sounds to reassure him.

"My God! What's this?"

He drew back with a gasp, for he had barely missed falling over the body of a man, that lay in a tumbled heap near the foot of the great stone staircase.

It was the body of Prince George; and the distorted features and staring eyes were horribly suggestive.

Prince George had sought his antidotes too late; the poison having gained such firm hold on his system that his death had been but the matter of a few minutes.

Falconberg stepped over the body and bounded up the staircase.

He found the wide hall deserted, and no sign of life anywhere on that first floor. But when he hastened up-stairs, he found the

door of a room ajar. On approaching it a man ran out and scuttled away like a scared rat.

It was Marcus Mix, the major's hopeful son.

Falconberg was after bigger game, and did not endeavor to stay the fleeing man. He was not prepared for the sight that greeted him when he entered the room from which young Mix had darted.

On the threshold lay a paper that had fallen from the hand of Marcus, and which he had evidently been reading. The detective picked it up, thrust it into his pocket without a glance, and then stepped within.

He drew back with an exclamation that was more startled than the one given below at the finding of the body of the black. Major Mix lay where he had fallen, and a rattle from a far corner revealed the whereabouts of the snakes.

Before Falconberg could give expression to his amazement, Seebring and Marlin crowded into the room after him. A glance served to show that Mix was dead.

The party almost instantly scattered for a search of the rooms, the grounds and the stable. But no other human being was found alive on the place. The blacks had escaped to the hills, no doubt terrified out of their wits at what had occurred, and Marcus had made himself invisible.

It may be as well to state here that young Mix had concealed himself in the mine, from which he afterward gained the mountains; and was no more seen by any of the actors in this story.

The paper he had been reading when surprised, and which he had probably found among those dropped to the floor by his father, held for all a very great disclosure.

It revealed the fact that the estate, which held the magnificent building and grounds and wonderful mine, had really been the property of the father of Mary Walden, who had died a number of years before. Believing Mix to be an upright man, he had confided to him the care of his daughter, as well as the estate. Mix had sent the daughter from him for a time, bringing her back some years later; though why, could never be told.

It was in this interval that he had built the house and laid out and beautified the grounds. The discovery of the mine enabled him to do this; and by dint of some financial jugglery, in which forgery played a prominent part, he had conveyed the estate to himself.

Of course it was glorious news for Mary Walden and Sam Seebring, as well as for their friends; and none more rejoiced in it than did Falconberg, his daughter Jeannette and her lover, Mark Lanyard.

Two months later there was a double wedding in the Utah capital, which attracted great attention. The high contracting parties were Mark Lanyard and Jeannette Falconberg, Samuel Seebring and Mary Walden.

Seebring and his wife settled on the splendid estate which had been wrongfully held by Major Mix; and in after years, when the mine could be worked safely and openly, it proved the bonanza of Seebring's early expectations.

Mark Lanyard, having been given a most excellent financial start by his father and father-in-law, began a prosperous business career in the city, and became eventually one of the leading men of the great and growing New West.

Falconberg's researches through the Mormon settlements finally disclosed the fact that his other daughter, Jeannette's twin sister, had died from natural causes, soon after being brought to this country; but in the daughter living, who seemed to him the very embodiment of his loved and long-departed wife, he had solace. And when prattling grandchildren began to cling and climb about his knees, he seemed to come into a new life and to put the dead past forever behind him.

Although the Wizard Detective settled down in Salt Lake City, making it his adopted home, he did not wholly abandon the practice of the magical arts which had rendered him so noted a figure; and throughout his long life was still, to the public, Fergus Flotsam, the Fire-King.

THE END.

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